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BRAZENHEAD THE GREAT

BY

MAURICE HEWLETT



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INVOCATION TO THE MUSE, AND EXORDIAL MATTER

SING, lady, that sangest erst of Tyrant and Parthenopex, of Blanchardyn and Aymon's mighty four, sing, I say, the seventh son of a seventh son, born by wonder in the seventh month; for in the deeds of such men, lady, thou takest thy delight. Sing greatly upon thine epic lyre how he hammered sconces, hacked and slew; how he bathed in blood like ducks in a puddle; how he drank and swore in many tongues; how popes and prelates, counts and cardinals, dukes and dicers, tumbled at the wag of his finger. Then in milder measure, love's roseate thumb being thy muting-piece, sing of love himself; for love, lady, as thou knowest, is, as it were, the bath of heroes, sweet solace after toil. In the beginning—but the lady is weary of this, and so am I.

Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them, we

know. To which I may add upon the account of the prodigious man whom it is my task to present to the gallantly inclined, that some thrust greatness upon themselves. The propositions are not mutually exclusive, and there are those who hold that the last is the most fruitful category of all. 'Tis there, say these, that you had best look for the hero of our day. All's one, I believe, to the three sisters who sand-blindly spin our destinies in some remote fastness of the Caucasus.

Born (however unduly) in a great age, living, so far as I can learn, to an age of his own of almost patriarchal limits, living every hour of that terrific span, and dying at last in a manner, at a hand, upon a sword-point, which I venture to say have never been matched by any champion of sacred or profane writ, Salomon Brazenhead has thrice-earned his sobriquet of the Great. No doubt he gave it to himself, the world being as much his oyster as the oyster of anybody else upon it. And no doubt he had the warrant of reason. I have adopted the style, and am confident of the approval of my reader, candid or otherwise. Captain Brazenhead—to give him that one of the many titles of honour by which he is best known—was born greatly, lived greatly, loved greatly, and died greatly. He was great in

height, great in girth, great in hair, great in thirst, great in heart: here are enough greats to fill the University of Oxford. Let them suffice for my title page.

The reader has here, I must allow, but certain detached Cantos of an Epic which, in full and at length (so far as I know), might stretch in the recital from this hour to the crack of doom. What is thus presented falls short of the requirements of Aristotle, having no beginning and no middle; but it has an end, and a surprising end, and Aristotelians must be content with that. I have been diligent in research; there are few of the archives of Europe into which I have not peered. My reward has been four considerable fragments of a huge original, and one of those—here presented under the title of The Captain of Kent—has been printed already in a book of five years since. But I have not scrupled to reproduce it for the sake of coherence—such coherence, that is, as may be attained unto by a rhapsodist who has to begin in the so-called middle of his theme. Assistance, however, has come to me from an unexpected source—too late in time and too scanty in substance for its incorporation into the body of my work. The profound Pilsenbierius, in his thesis for the doctor's degree of his University, states in these words the result of his enquiry into the early

history of my hero. He says: "After a prolonged study of the sources, preserved at the Public Record Office and Guildhall Library in London, I am clearly of opinion that the mythus of the Seventh-Born is not to be supported, but is, in fact, an accretion of later and less vigorous, more literary ages. Probably solar in its origin—for the name of Brazenhead not inaptly describes the sun, burning centre of our system, and the title of 'Seventh-Born' almost certainly indicates the sun of the seventh day, or Saturday, the Sabbath of the Jews (cf. the praenomen Salomon, invariably used by the hero, who is thus connected with Judas Maccabaeus and other Hebrew Captains of antiquity, and therefore with Joshua who made the sun to stand still)—it can nevertheless be to an historic fact and passage quite fearlessly ascribed. For it is my duty to assert in this place and thesis that the unusual birth of Salomon Brazenhead (still to call him so) can be accounted for by another hypothesis, which documents support. In the records of the Halimote Court of the City of London, obligingly put at my disposal by the ever courteous and no less learned librarian, there is preserved an entry, under date the 7th July, 1377, to the effect that Mald (or Maud) Brassinhand was convicted before the mayor and aldermen as a common scold, and

pleaded her condition. She was nevertheless adjudged to be ducked in the pond on Moorfields incontinently. *Quod erat factum.*" Here truly is very suggestive evidence, which does not need the invocation of supernal powers to make all plain. All that is wanting to it, indeed, is evidence that Mald Brassinhand was the mother of six children, and that Salomon Brazenhead was her seventh; but these are small matters in comparison with miracles.

The evidence is curious, but not of poetical quality, and accordingly I have not composed it into a book of my Epic. I love facts as much as any man born, but as a poet I know when to use them and when to leave them out. Herr Doctor Pilsenbierius evidently does not. But I shall hope to publish before I die a translation of his thesis, of which the above-cited passage may be taken as a fair sample.

I am not without hopes that I shall recover further staves of this remarkable and hitherto unknown Epos by diligent and continued enquiry. In the Free Library of Aleppo, whither I hope soon to travel, I have heard of a manuscript which must contain a portion of at least one: to wit, the "Narrative of Bekr' ibn Salas concerning a recent voyage with the Brazen Soldier of Ancona in the year of the Hegira,

826." I connect this, by intuition, with Captain Brazenhead's alleged interview with the Pope, which took place, I understand, at Ancona. He had another, we know, at Avignon; but that must have been earlier.

1911.

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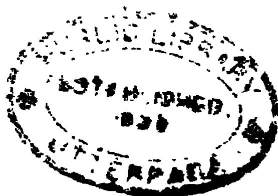
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THE DUKE OF MILAN



CHAPTER I

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD PROVED HIMSELF TO BE TWICE AS OLD AS HE LOOKED

THAT many times repeated asseveration of Captain Brazenhead's, that he had formed one of the suite of Duke Lionel when that prince went out to Lombardy to marry Visconti's daughter, and that, in consequence, the poet Chaucer—"little Smug-face" as he was pleased to call him—was his fellow-traveller and bosom friend, bore at the first blush the stamp of truth. It was always supported by vigorous reminiscence; the older he grew, the more positive he was of it. Like the Apostle, confronted by tales of the sort, we might partly believe it. But it would make him out to have been one hundred and five years old at the time of his death, or necessitate his having been born into this world with thirty-seven years already to his score. Here is a problem for the historian which we may prudently leave him.

I think it was his manner of telling the tale which gave confidence to those who had watched

his rapt gaze into the embers of the hearth, who had observed his easy length of leg, and hands clasped behind his head, and the pleasant gloss which recollection might well have laid upon his sombre and seldom-smiling lips. "It all comes back to me," he would say, "by my head, and so it does! Little Smugface! Little scrivening Geoffrey, and his age-long tales of Troy town! Blithely he strung stave to stave—and we, a gay company of drones, clustered about the honey of his tongue; and my lord's grace pounding before us on his black courser! He would rehearse of Dido, the lily queen, of the piled faggots, of the flame. Ha! and she in the midst, as white as an egg! It welled out of him like treacle from a broken crock; and my lord's grace, with ears set back, lost not a syllabub of it. Long days, brave days—ah, how they rise and beckon me!" It really sounds very plausible.

All this as it may be, what is beyond cavil is that I find him at Pavia in the year 1402, a fine figure of a man, scarred, crimson, shining in the face, his hair cropped in the Burgundian mode, moustachios to the ears, holding this kind of discourse to a lank and cavernous warrior, three times his own apparent age, who had proposed, I gather, before a tavern full of drinkers, to eat him raw. He stood astraddle, one arm crooked, his hand on his hip. He looked at his rival's boots; but his words must have winged directly to his heart. "Who eats me chokes, for I am like that succulent that conceals, d'ye see, his

spines in youthful bloom. You think you have to do with a stripling: not you, pranking boy, not you. I am a seamed and notch-fingered soldier, who belched Greek fire while you were in your swaddling-clout. I was old in iniquity ere they weaned you. Or do you vie with me in perils, by Cock, do you so? Five times left for dead; trampled six times out by the rearguard of the host I had led to victory; crucified, stoned, extenuated, cut into strips; in prisons frequent, in deaths not divided—what make you of it? And you to tell me that your green guts can pouch old Leather-tripes, for so they dub me who dare? Foh, you are a bladder, I see!"

He bit his thumb, and did that with his fingers to his nose whose import is sinister. I believe no man can bear it and live on. The irons came swingeing out, the room cleared; all the frequenters of the tavern sat on the tables, while the tapsters strewed sawdust on the floor. They had need. There was a ding-dong passage of arms of one hundred and thirty seconds, which was ample time for Captain Brazenhead to run his foe through the weazand, wipe his blade in his armpit, finish his drink and say: "There lies long Italy." All this in one hundred and thirty seconds. Five minutes more remained to the fallen brave, and were not too much for what he had to do—namely, cough blood, say the Ave Maria, and bequeath a pair of horns to the tapster, Gregory.

Captain Brazenhead's reputation was established in Pavia, his age what he pleased. Admirers crowded about him, to pledge and be pledged in cups. He was asked his name, and said that it was Testadirame—very neat, for the spur of the moment; his trade, and pointed to his extended foe. It was replied to him by a brother of St. Francis who squinted that then Greek and Greek had met and engaged, seeing that the dead man in life had been Lisciassangue—Lisciassangue the exorbitant, assassin to the Duke of Milan, one of a Mystery of Three.

At this critical moment in his career Captain Brazenhead paused in the act to drink, and looking down over the edge of his flagon, thoughtfully stirred the dead with his toe.

"His sword is a good one," said he, "and I take it, as right is. What he may have in poke I bestow in alms upon the poor drinkers of Pavia. But as to his trade, or mystery, I must hear more of that." One glance at the religious commentator shrivelled him. "Speak!" he commanded him. "Speak, thou flea-pasture, or I split thee!"

Ah, but they spoke. They all spoke at once. They all clambered the tables again and leaned over each other to speak. Straining out their arms, see-sawing in air, they spoke with hands and eyes and voices. Captain Brazenhead, a sword to the good, listened and learned. To the ready reckoner he was, the accounts were

soon cast up. If there were in Milan twenty-nine churches, thirty convents of religion, and seven-and-thirty jails all full; if there were no penalty in the code but that of death; and if it were true that the Duke, feeling the cares of his lands, the needs of his subjects, and his own advancing years, had relaxed his personal activities, and now did his justice by deputy—then it was most certain that the Mystery of Three could not afford to lose the services of Lisciassangue; no, nor Duke Galeazzo neither. His Grace's condition was indeed deplorable, robbed of one-third of his assassins.

"I see the aged monarch," mused Captain Brazenhead, overheard by a sympathetic throng, "maimed, as you might say, of his right hand. I see his prisons full to brim-point, his lieutenants at work night and day to keep abreast of the flood. But, alas, for the Duke of Milan! they have lost a friend, maybe; he has lost a member. Gentlemen!"—he cried this aloud with a surprising gallantry—"Gentlemen, you must pity him, since you have hearts; but I must help him or be untrue to this good arm. Now, then, the next man that offers to drink with me shall not have nay."

Reasoning of this sort enkindled his wits. He could not restore to the Duke his Lisciassangue: the dead was most dead; but so far as might be he would repair his fault. If, in so doing, he opened a career for himself, shall he be blamed for the added glow which the thought lent to his

blood? Not by any generous man. "There lies long Italy," he had said, and the words flashed up again, and revealed him a nation at his feet. To Milan, to Milan—and "there lies long Italy in the cup of my hand," says he.

CHAPTER II

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD USED THE KING'S WRIT

Blithe was the morn and blithe the adventure when, rising in his stirrups, Captain Brazenhead, like Chanticlere the Valiant, saluted the sun. Red in the mist, it lit the road to Milan ; red in the mist that city showed, admirably strong, remarkable to any soldier's eye. He saw double walls, towers innumerable, many gates of port and antiport, the bulk of a square castle, belfries of churches, and outside the ditch, in a broad meadow, a tented camp, with silk pavilions for the captains, and men-at-arms in black-and-white liveries executing manœuvres at the double.

"This Milan," said Captain Brazenhead, "lacks only water to flood the marshes to be as impregnable as Jericho of old—more so, indeed, since Jericho, I do remember, was reduced by a man of God. He, it appears, by taking a walk round about it in the cool of the day, could level those proud walls, as with a breath you have down your house of cards. But those are tactics of despair.

I would only use them when all else had failed me."

A young woman in a striped petticoat and kerchiefed head, who rode sideways upon an ass and nursed a baby, was upon the road before him, and gave a tender note to the warlike scene. The avenue of budding trees framed her in like a picture, dappled her with light and shade. "Venus rideth to assuage Mars his fury," said he, "and a pretty turn to the head she hath." He quickened his pace, overtook and accosted her.

"Damsel, by your leave," he said, "we undertake this adventure in company. Why, cheerly then, and cry Tickle my chin." She looked at him askance out of her doves' eyes, but his gaiety was not to be denied.

"But, sir," said she, "I know not how that may fall out."

He stooped towards her. "I know a couple will never fall out while the sun shineth on Milan," he admonished her.

"I, too, sir," she replied, "for I am a married woman."

"It is very evident," said the captain, with genial warmth. "In that fine little girl——"

She bit her lip. "It is a boy, sir. I had supposed you better instructed. But you and I must not be seen together at the gate."

Captain Brazenhead turned his gaze most earnestly upon her.

"Listen now," he said. "There's Fate in this our meeting. One star leans to another

in conjunction. We do what we do under the swaying of the spheres. So sure as your name is——"

"Oh!" she cried, all in a flame, "who told you that my name was Liperata?"

The soldier smiled. "Why, you, my dear. But I am in Fortune's way. I have a net, and have enmeshed thee, fair partridge. Contend no more, fold thy beating wings. We go through the gate together; afterwards we must see our way. Thou art my passport, Liperata, and I defend thy reputation with my last breath."

She had no answer ready, so they ambled on together. Her confusion became her. It was to remain with him a balmy memory—like a remembered fragrance in sultry weather.

What amiable intentions he may have had in her regard, however, did not avail him to pass the entry of Milan. The posted sentinels, seeing a fine man in leather, with two swords, bestriding a horse, three of whose legs, at least, were ready for war, ran nimbly in and called out the guard. Monna Liperata, free of the gates, dug heels into her donkey's ribs and jogged into the city, glancing back but once as she turned the street corner. Captain Brazenhead, however, confronted a double row of halberdiers.

He was vexed. "How now?" he cried. "Am I hosts of Midian? Caesar with his legions? Am I Tamerlane at the door? or what the devil?"

They told him that no man could pass the

gates of the city without lawful warrant. That was inexorable.

"What is, is," said Captain Brazenhead, "and what must be, shall be. *Et in sæcula sæculorum, Amen.* You wish for my warrant, masters?" He drew from his breast a strip of parchment, folded, sealed, and bound with a green cord. "Take," he said, "and read it who can."

Now, they could not; but they examined the seal, which was a broad one, with the arms of England and France upon it.

"Read you, rather," they said; so Captain Brazenhead recited the exordium, being no more able to read Latin (nor, indeed, any written tongue) than his auditors.

"*Henricus dei gratia Rex Angliæ et Franciæ et dominus Hiberniæ dilecto et fideli suo T. de Compton Vicecomiti Middlesexiæ salutem.*" He read no more, because he knew no more, but crushing up the parchment in his fist, looked sublimely down upon the gaping soldiery, and his words extended to the curious merchants who stood at the doors of their little shops watching the game.

"You see very well how it is, men of Lombardy," he proclaimed. "The King of England and France and Lord of Ireland sends this affectionate greeting to his cousin Milan. What, ye sour-chops, ye will not understand? Hearken, then yet again!"

As they wondered amongst themselves, he re-opened the scroll, and smacked it with his fist.

"*Henricus dei gratia*, hey? How's that for my King Harry? And *Vicecomiti*, hey? Is it not your Visconti written fair? And will you, hirelings," he added, with a searching change of tone, "will you thrust up your dirty hands between the kissing lips of kings?"

They said that they would not, and saw in the smile that stole over the hero's face a strong resemblance to the gleaming of the morning sun upon the scarred brow of an Alp.

"Then, lead on, peeping Tom," were the bold words. "My business here is to greet king from king."

A strong escort conducted him through the narrow ways of the city, and presented him to the Captain of the Castle. His writ was taken over, turned about, and (since nothing could be made of it) carried away to yet more learned officers. Captain Brazenhead meanwhile sat, quite at his ease, in the gatehouse quarters, affably conversing with all and sundry. His cause may have been good; his nerve was better.

After a period of suspense, which may have lasted an hour, or may have lasted three, two clerics entered the gatehouse and saluted him with great respect.

Captain Brazenhead stood up. "How now, my reverends?"

One of them said: "Your Excellency's credentials have been examined by our master, the Great Chamberlain, to whose mind certain little difficulties have presented themselves, which

can only be dispersed by your Excellency's self."

"Like enough," said Captain Brazenhead, and closed one of his eyes. "But I'll warrant you that I disperse 'em."

But the spokesman, an elderly brother of St. Dominic's order of religion, was now examining the writ.

"It is clear," said he, "that the King, your master, directs this letter to a kinsman of our Duke, though in what degree of consanguinity the Lord T. de Compton Visconti may be to his Grace we are unable to determine."

Captain Brazenhead ejaculated "Cousin," but the Dominican did not seem to heed him.

"We see further," he pursued, poring over the parchment, "that this Lord Visconti is to have the body of one Salomone, to answer to his lord the King why with force and arms he brake the close of one Jak a-Style, and took therefrom certain of the goods of the said Jak—— to wit, five hens and one cock of the value of one shilling. So far we agree, my brother, I think?"

He looked at his colleague, who nodded gravely; and then both of them looked at his Excellency.

"By my faith, gentleman," said Captain Brazenhead, after a pause for breath, "you know more about this than I do. But I will tell you the plain truth. I was in my castle of Baynard's in Middlesex on a day, my hounds at my feet, arms laid aside; taking my ease, picking my teeth

with a dagger—when the lieutenant of this same Visconti came pressing in. He must by all means see me, saith he; cannot be denied. He serves me with this—what do I say? He tenders me this scrip, saying, 'Testadirame, look to it.' A nod or a wink! What care I? Enough for you that I understand him. I take horse and arms incontinent, and off—as it were from Visconti of Middlesex to the head of his house here in Milan; but in reality, doubt it not, from King to King. Of your cocks and hens, or cocks and bulls, of Jak a-Style's poultry-yard, I know nothing. But I take it that a king can put as many things into his letters as he pleases. Gossip of the day! Or, it may well be, sand in the eyes of your Worships, who (let me tell you) are not to know everything. No, no. But I would have you know this much at least, my reverend brothers, that I have no sort of business with your Honours, and much with him you serve. My business with him is both heavy and light; it is bitter-sweet, but for his ear alone. Yours with me is to take me to his ear. Advise among yourselves now what you will do next. For my part, I sit here well enough, though I should have said, mind you, that it was the dinner-hour. In my own country it is long past it, but of your customs here in Milan, in this great house of a generous prince, I cannot speak—at present."

"All this," said the Dominican, "shall be faithfully reported to the Duke our master."

So said, he vanished with his pied brother.

CHAPTER III

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD HAILED THE DUKE OF MILAN

It must have been in the late afternoon when Captain Brazenhead (who, in the meantime, had dined) received the desired summons from the mouth of a handsome page. Following this resplendent youth, whose scarlet thighs, whose trim green jerkin and cloud of yellow hair lost nothing by earnest scrutiny, he had to admit that he had not understood rulers of states to be so hard to come by. But the Tyrant of Milan, he believed, could be no ordinary monarch. He counted the corridors with doors at both ends of each; in every door a grille, through which he was very conscious of inspection before the bolts were drawn. He commented upon this.

"Your Duke Galeass is as coy as a winkle in his shell," he suggested; to which the iridescent young man had no more reply than a lively look at the walls about him, and a finger to his lip. Handed on then to a gentleman-at-arms, he was admitted to an ante-room, where he was divested of his two swords, the hanger at his belt, and of another

which was found in his trunks. He was then blind-folded and led about and about until, the bandage removed, he found himself standing before the narrow door of a vaulted passage, confronted by two halberdiers in black and a priest with a crucifix.

Captain Brazenhead wished these gentlemen a good day, and made a fine attempt to whistle the air of "In the meadow so green," but the remark was received in silence, and the gallantry quenched by the priest, who, holding up his crucifix, administered an oath to the visitor of so dreadful a character that my pen, very properly, refuses to set it down. In effect, it bound him down in fearful penalties, both temporal and eternal, if he ventured anything against the Duke's person.

"As if," he said, looking blandly around, "as if I should hurt the little man! I, Brazenhead, to whom the sparrows in the corn are playmates!" Adding, however, that hard words would never break *his* bones, he cheerfully took it, and kissed the crucifix. Then the priest knocked three times at the door. It opened just wide enough to admit a man edgeways; Captain Brazenhead stood up in a dark and long apartment, lit at the further end by swinging lamps. There in that wavering light sat the Duke of Milan in his elbow-chair and furred gown, with his hands stretched out over a charcoal fire, and showed a quick-eyed, white, and beardless face, lively with fear, turned back to watch the visitor. It was to be seen that he was a hunchback, to be guessed that he wore

chain-mail. He had three guards by the wall, two by the door. With one hand he now grasped his chair; with the other plucking at his throat, he recoiled and waited. It was very quiet in the room—so much so that you could hear the Duke's breath, fetched short and quickly.

Like a rush of south-west wind making havoc in a cloister, the superb figure of Captain Brazenhead—with his six feet two inches, his cloak thrown back, his buoyant moustachios and eagle nose—seemed to fill the presence-chamber. Inspired to utterance, strung taut as he was by the occasion, he broke upon the silence of that churchyard-vault with the crash and clatter of a trumpet.

"Hail, Ironsides!" he proclaimed, and the halberdiers backed to the walls. He said no less and added no more—nor need he.

CHAPTER IV

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD EXEMPLIFIED HIS MAXIMS

Now it was plain that the apostrophe pleased. The Duke relaxed his hold upon the chair, left his throat alone, and, shivering, returned his hands to the fire. Looking into that, he asked in a dry voice—

"Who are you that call me by my name?"

"Testadirame," was the answer, which he meditated, poring into the fire.

"Your business, Testadirame?"

He seemed already tired of all this, but he had an answer which quickened him.

"Death," said Captain Brazenhead, "is my business."

Many and many a maxim of rhetoric as this hero exemplified in his career through the courts and camps of Europe, it may be said with confidence that he never brought more apposite illustration to that one which teaches: "If you would be listened to at length, be heard first in brief. Strike," says this profound guide to persuasion, "strike hard and sharply." So struck

Brazenhead here, and saw the tyrant pale, and flicker like a blown candle-flame at the dreadful word. His contorted face, his eyes, as he turned them upon the speaker, were those of a trapped hare. He mouthed rather than voiced his cry: "Ha, treason!" and his guards shot forward between his person and the other's. But Captain Brazenhead folded his arms, and, nodding his head with certain emphasis, was oracular again. One could not be more oracular.

"Who touches me dies the death I profess. Listen."

And Duke Galeazzo listened, and his guards gaped.

"I ask no more of Providence than a foot inside the door"—a favourite saying of his. Having got that beyond question, he never faltered in the flood of his discourse, which, like a river fed by a thousand rills, sucking substance as it runs from mountain and morass, rolled free and irresistible towards its goal. If the matter of his allocution was extraordinary—as it was—its manner made it reasonable and indeed inevitable. You might as well have headed up the Danube as Captain Brazenhead when once he was under way. The tongues of men and of angels seemed in pawn to him who, without pause or stay, spoke headlong, with a fierce and white-hot fluidity indescribable by me, for the space of an hour and a quarter. His subject ranged from metaphysics to man-slaughter; he borrowed freely and impartially, now from the Seraphic Doctor,

now from Hermes, the Thrice-Mage. These, the sages and captains of antiquity, Plato and Holophernes, Quintus Fabius and Michael Scot, Roger Bacon, the Witch of Endor, and other ladies and gentlemen, as it were, dissolved in oil, came swirling down the tide. Not the sciences only, but the Virtues, Justice, Fortitude, and Mercy, with examplars of each, engaged his tongue. He did not forget the clemency of Scipio, the Spartan boy, Mutius Scævola, Susanna before the Elders. He became particular, dwelt intimately upon the infirmities of kings. He knew how many lovers had Semiramis, what ravages the fire made in the breast of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, what proved a stumbling-block to Cæsar, how Charlemagne doted, the luxuries of the Persian kings: he rehearsed them all, brought them all to a fermenting head, and, if I may say so, slicing off that head, laid it on the point of his tongue at the feet of Milan. His whirling oratory, his flights of frenzied search into the history of men and movements of which he knew little or nothing, his *élan*, his endurance, and his mendacity were but one concentrated tribute to the little changeling by the fire.

To say that this monarch was dazed is to state a mere fact, to infer that he was flattered is to argue a high probability. That he was relieved when Captain Brazenhead stopped at last with a vigorous clearing of the throat and a "That's the truth, by Cock, take it as you will!"—of that there is no shadow of doubt. He was so

greatly relieved that he had at first no word to say; and when he did speak, it was not to inquire concerning the message of Visconti of Middlesex or King Henry's greetings, but to ask in a voice which was the pale reflection of his mood: "What wouldst thou of me, soldier?"

Captain Brazenhead, who had thought that he had made himself plain, was for once embarrassed.

"Why, sir," said he, "there was a fellow in your service called Lisciassangue—and a paltry rogue."

The Tyrant started, echoed him: "There was? Aye," he said grimly, "and there is."

"There is not, my lord duke," said the captain, "and that's a fact; for he is done and done with. He lies his length, so much dead meat, in a tavern of Pavia. Now you may have him by the pound."

The Duke started and turned. "You have him——" he began to say.

"Aye, my lord, aye!" he was told. "You may have him avoirdupois. I saw him so myself no later than yesternight. And here stand I, Testadirame, friend of Visconti of Middlesex, late of Burgundy, Scourge of the Alps, offering you myself in his room. 'Tis for that I am come, from Visconti of Middlesex to him of Milan—I, Testadirame, bosom's mate of Death."

Visconti paused, staring, as if fascinated, at the bosom's mate of Death.

"Do you dare to pretend," he said, "that

you can stand where Lisciassangue stood? Are you so bold?"

Captain Brazenhead replied, "But I am."

"But he slew his thousands, man," said Visconti.

Captain Brazenhead replied, "But I slew *him*."

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Now, the fact is that the Duke of Milan, caring nothing for Lisciassangue, cared greatly for death. His own was of painful and constant interest, but that of any other man was his passion. Therefore, when Captain Brazenhead, by that dazzling admission, spoke, for the first time that day, the truth, Visconti's eyes began to glitter, and there came a sound of "Ah!" from him, as of breath drawn in slowly. He was watched with minute attention.

And there was to be discerned in his voice a note of decision.

"Tell me," he said, "how you killed that man; prove to me that you did it, and I appoint you to his place."

Captain Brazenhead smiled. "These things are easy to me," he replied. "The proof is in the antechamber, where I have left his sword along with mine which did the business. As for the manner of his death, that is a small affair. Had he been a greater man, I had been more curious in dealing. I am a carver and gilder when the hire is good or the stuff worthy. But this knave! He angered me, and I drew upon him; he blundered, and I played. I was fanciful,

d'ye see? I took slices off him here and there till he gleamed before me in stripes of red and white. He was like a dressed radish before I had done with him, or a mannikin cut out of a carrot, or a slipped beetroot. Aye, aye, and there he lies—at your money by the pound."

The Duke, gloating over the fire, felt the first warmth of that day in his fevered bones. "Bring me," he desired, "the man's sword, that I may look on it and believe." They fetched it, and he ran his fingers up the furrowed blade.

"I gave two hundred sequins for it in Ferrara," he said musingly. "We call it Jezebel." He held it out. "Take, wield, Testadirame. Jezebel is yours."

This is the manner of Captain Brazenhead's appointment to be Third Murderer to the Duke of Milan.

CHAPTER V

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD DEALT WITH A BURGUNDIAN IN A TUNNEL

A FOOT *inside the door*, indeed! And here was Captain Brazenhead with his whole fine body within already. Comfortable quarters and free table, a livery all of red, with a mask for business purposes, flattering attentions from lacqueys of all sorts, partnership with two such ruffians, Camus and Gelsomino, as never, even in his experience, had tainted the air before—what could a soldier of fortune want with more? It is the misfortune of such gentlemen, when their imaginations are ardent and habit sanguine, that they can be seduced more easily by a phrase than by all the sensible temptations of Saint Anthony the Abbot. If the kindling of noble rage by a neat allocution can ever be called a misfortune, so it was with Captain Brazenhead—that when his prospects seemed most fair he told himself that all was still to do. "There lies long Italy," that too happy phrase, was what moved his discontent. To be Third Murderer to the Duke of Milan was

to be something; but long Italy did not lie murdered, as yet.

His colleagues—Camus, who beneath a beetling Roman brow had the thin and bitter lips and hoarse voice of a fed Caesar, and Gelsomino, easily mistaken for a Tartar with the toothache, with red rims to his eyes and a sour mouth shockingly awry—made plain to him his duties from the outset. He was to kill daintily, and report every night to the Duke, his master, the means and the manner of his killing. Imagination was to go to it; it was not enough to kill; he must be an artist, he must compose his murders, give them a lyrical pitch. The Prince, now that his fear had taken hold of him, was no longer able to witness the sport he loved; but his enthusiasm for it burned clear and bright, and the fire now in his blood gave a zest to his understanding such as his eyes had never lent it. He was, clearly, a virtuoso; he collected murders as other men bronzes. Captain Brazenhead, therefore, was to excel; it was little use to offer such a master anything but the best of its kind. "Kill," said Camus, "but be eloquent above all. Be a poet, brother." And Gelsomino added: "Aye! Braid your periods with blood; let your stresses be gashes, your *caesuras* rents. Rhyme your *passados*, balance your refrains, now on this side, now on that. Stab in your Ha's! and Ugh's! and spare not your God-ha'-mercies! for by such comments you enhance a poorer recital than you need conceive. For the rest you have a free hand, and a

choice of implements in the armoury. I never, myself, saw a prettier set of tools, though by my grandsire's account the great Lord Eccelino had twice the number. But we have a blade with a double crook in it, a narrow steel, sinuous, like a watersnake. I recommend it. We call it The Horseleech's Daughter—a happy name, I think. Come now, colleague, will you open the ball? There is a fellow in the Tunnel, bursting ripe. Will you take him for a beginning?"

Captain Brazenhead, sitting stiffly by the wall, nursed his leg in silence. His mood was short, his method precise. "Is he but one then? Do you pit me to one man?" He frowned. "His offence!" was his next question, and he was told, deer-stealing in the Duke's park of Marignano. It shocked him out of his dignity. "What!" he cried. "Am I to embellish a man out of the world for a collop of venison? Let the hangman deal with him; let him dance in the air—or you will ask me next to whip dogs."

Gelsomino said: "As you will. 'Tis pity you fly off so fast, for this is a great fellow of his hands. Not that he will look amiss on the gallows, by any means, for the bulk of him is bound to tell. But there he lies, for you or the tree; 'tis for you to say."

Captain Brazenhead's eyes had begun to glitter.

"'Tis a big bulk, you tell me, and a man of his hands. Bones in him? Thews to him? I'll see the man—I may make something of him.

What's his lodging? The Tunnel, d'ye call it? Let me see him, then."

"It will be a torchlight work," said Camus; "chancy, merry work."

"It shall be merrier than you guess for," said Captain Brazenhead, "for I'll have at him in the dark."

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But he took a torch with him when he went masked to his work. By its shuddering light he saw his man at the far end of the dripping vault —his steady eyes, his mouth firmly set, his square jaw; a broad-shouldered, high-coloured young man.

Next he surveyed the theatre of his operations, truly named the Tunnel, since it was nothing else. "Light bad, a tricky floor, little play for the arm. We must thread with the point, I see." He fixed the torch into a ring in the wall, took off his cloak, rolled up his sleeve, cleared his throat, and said, "Now, brother."

With lowered head, but indomitable eyes, the victim awaited his death-stroke. It came not; the tense moment was sharply broken by a cry from the executioner. "By the Mass, the man's tied up!" He dropped his sword, and advancing, took a file from his belt, and severed the manacles which held the prisoner fast to the walls. Having resumed his blade and first position, he adjured him cheerfully. "Now, then——" But the other's head remained bowed, and he kept to his knees.

"Little man," said Captain Brazenhead, "I am waiting. Lift up your head and play the soldier."

The prisoner replied: "I conceive that I play that best by suffering what I cannot avoid." Nevertheless he raised his head. "You intend to murder me," he continued. "I have commended my soul to God, and bow my body to necessity, not to you."

"Bow not at all, by Cock!" said Captain Brazenhead; "but jump up, minion, and play with me. What! we are only young once, so who says die?" He held out two swords. "Here is a choice of irons, take which you will. This one is of Pistoja, and is the longer! but Ferrara tried this other seven times in the fire. The choice is yours."

"What is this?" the prisoner stammered. And then he panted like a dog.

"Battle, my son," said Captain Brazenhead; "bloody, beauteous battle. No one is by; we have a fair field. You know the ground and are the younger man; but, maybe, I am in better fettle. I see that you have courage, and tell you fairly that I have some. To it, gamester, and the best throw wins."

The prisoner sobbed, then laughed aloud. "Oh, wonder!" he cried, deliriously; "I had thought you my executioner."

"So I am," said Captain Brazenhead; "make no mistake."

"And yet—you offer me——"

"Why," said the Captain, "am I not to have my pleasure as well as you? Do you take me for a poulterer or a cat's-meat man?"

The prisoner threw up his arms. "Oh," says he, "here is one cast in a great mould."

Captain Brazenhead accepted the compliment. "I am a pretty fighter, I do believe," he owned. "Will you have at me in the dark? A word, and I beat out the torch."

The prisoner had taken over a sword, and was making cuts in the air. He cried: "Ha!" and stamped. Up went his left hand as he lunged forward with gaiety. "A touch!" he cried. "Have at you, soldier!"

"What of the light?" he was asked severely, and answered—

"Leave it, leave it. 'Tis a pleasure to see your face."

"Gallantly said, butcher boy," returned Captain Brazenhead, and threw himself into position. "One, two; one, two; engage!" And they closed.

To it they went, as merry as could be, thrusting, foining, slicing. The deer-stealer was very limber, and had a lightning eye. Captain Brazenhead touched him once on the upper arm, but himself received no hurt. When the younger man cried "Truce!" his executioner was not sorry to oblige him.

* * * * *

With all the intentions in the world to do justice to the last extremity upon the malefactor

before him, Captain Brazenhead could not forbear to admire so stout a fighter. And generosity being the essence of him, he must needs praise where he admired. Each leaning on his sword, the hero spake.

"Comrade, I see that thou art a have-at-you kind of a dog-fox. Thou hast learned thy trade in a good school of fence."

"The best," said the prisoner, deep-breathing.

"Thou hast served Burgundy!" This was one of the Captain's flashes of inspiration, and it sped like an arrow to the mark.

Reverberation thrilled from the prisoner, as memories kindled in his eyes.

"Ah, and so I have," he said, "and with brave fellows. The days were too long, or the nights too short, for the game we loved. I know not which was the matter."

"'Tis little matter either way," mused aloud his executioner, who in turn was deeply stirred. "Many found them the same." He looked darkling at the other—darkling and shrewdly. "Knewst thou the Fish? The Thumb-marked Fish in Besançon? And long-earned Noll, the drawer there?" The prisoner raised an eyebrow and smiled awry. "Eh, if I knew them! Hark to this drinker!" But the Captain leaned intensely forward, his voice down to a whisper. "Say—and Joconde?"

The prisoner kept his eyes fixed upon his foe. "She and I," said he carefully, "were old enemies. She beat me at last."

"Aye!" cried the Captain, on fire, "aye! and so she would. A many went down."

"Among them was I," the prisoner confessed, "but there was one, a tall man, who never failed."

"Ha!" said Brazenhead, hoarsely. "What, a hollow man, a drinker?"

"He could drink against twelve."

"And was ready with his blade?"

"He was ready."

"Hairy? A deep and curious swearer? Could notch a shaft to purpose?"

"My arm," said the prisoner, "was the cross-bow; but that man had a long arm."

The Captain was trembling. "His name, his name, Burgundian?"

The answer came slowly. "They called the man *Tête-d'airain*, with reason. I loved him, as you might love the Pope of Rome—that is, with reverence, from afar."

His hearer gulped down his emotion. "Thy name, then, is——?"

"Bernart," he said, "is my name of the Church. But they called me *Tranche-coupe* for short."

Captain Brazenhead lightly plucked off his mask, and held his arms out wide.

"To my bosom, child! to my breast! I am thy dear gossip Brazenhead!" There followed an affecting scene. . . .

"I carved my name upon him," was the substance of the Third Murderer's report to his

master and lord. "I carved my name out upon him, and he died of the dot on the *i*. So perish all thine enemies, Milan!" But it is nevertheless the fact that Bernart Tranche-coupe lay snug on straw in a cellar, awaiting the orders of his executioner and friend.

Captain Brazenhead has been blamed for this clemency, but not by me. He had intended to do his work when his blood was properly warmed by battle, and but for his memories would have done it. I think it was the name and hardy shadow of Joconde that saved the Burgundian.

CHAPTER VI

DESPERATE DOINGS WITH A BISCAYAN

When he was told off for the duty of strangling three ruffians who lay chained in the well of Santa Chiara, Captain Brazenhead hesitated, but only for a moment. It appears that, for once, he doubted of his prowess. "'Tis true, I once hanged a running dog, when I was a lad," he allowed; "but since then the sword hath been my arm; and sometimes the long-bow—sometimes the long-bow. Yet tell me over their names and conditions, that I may consider them."

The three prisoners, they told him, were Lo Spagna, Squarcialupo, and a nameless young man, an Egyptian. Lo Spagna was a one-armed man of surpassing strength and infamous conversation, consorting with Hussites and Waldensians, suspected of a plot to take off the Duke in the Sacrament. Squarcialupo was old in sin. He had been in the galleys at Lerici, and having torn up a bench with his teeth, had used it as a club and freed himself. Retaken at Bergamo, he had been offered his freedom upon condition that he would eat one of his fellows on the chain, and had

shortly refused. "A very contumacious villain," was Captain Brazenhead's comment; "but too good for the cord. Well, and who is your third?"

Nothing was known about the Egyptian, save that he had a ragged ear, and was branded on the shoulder with a galloping horse. "Why," says the Captain, "and how else would you brand an Egyptian? But continue." This Egyptian, they said, was in the well, on the information of the Augustinian Order, for atheism. At this the Captain's eye showed a dangerous light. "What! he denies God! If he does so, he strangles; but I'll never believe it of any but the Jews."

There seemed no room for doubt, however. The proof was that when he was put before an image of the Holy Virgin, he addressed it in an unknown tongue, which was exactly what a man would do when he intended to deny her divine attributes.

The Captain shook his head. "It looks black against him, and so it does. I take a whipcord in my poke for this renegado. He shall say the *Ave* backwards before he chokes."

One whipcord, then, three sacks, and three swords besides his own, formed his equipment for the execution of the Law's decree. "There may be nothing in it, after all," he considered; "and I'll not spoil sport until I am obliged." It will be seen that he again intended to temper justice with hard knocks.

* * * * *

To the Pozzo Santa Chiara he strode in his

awful array, and was lowered into it by a bucket on a windlass. Now, the well was literally that, thirty feet deep and fifteen across. In the midst was a brick pier, to the which the three condemned ruffians were fettered, two by the leg and one by the neck. The rains might rot and the sun shrivel them, for all was open to the sky.

The dreadful apparition of a man, whiskered, gigantic, masked, clothed in blood-red, with four swords under his arm, three sacks over his shoulder, and the end of a whipcord hanging from his trunks, produced its unfailing effect. The chained wretches backed the length of their tether, and squatting on their hams, blinked and gibbered at their doom. The Egyptian, clasping his brown knees in his hands, buried his face between them and appeared to be praying to the devil.

Nothing in the executioner's first words extenuated their despair.

"Friends of misery," he said, "you bond-servants of concupiscence, an offended God and the Law's sacred nature alike demand your righteous extermination. They demand it of me, Testadirame, and it is not likely that I shall fail them. Prepare then to account for the uttermost farthing of your debts, and see me notch the tallies, by Cock." The Egyptian did not move nor cease his prayers; Squarcialupo sniffed through one nostril, while he held the other firmly against his knee. "Stand up, Lo Spagna," the Captain roared, "stand up, you left-handed devil, and meet Testadirame, drinker of blood."

The little, black-bearded, snub-nosed man, bent nearly double amidships, shuffled to his feet, and saluted the dreadful swordsman. He, erect and discerning, assorted him at once.

"There is this to be said of thee, Lo Spagna, that if thou hast lost an arm, thou canst spare it better than most. That which thou hast is too long by cubits. What, Barbary, canst thou scratch a flea? Canst thou pitch a cocoanut? Ha, tree-topster, show thy tail, then."

At this shocking mirth Lo Spagna grunted uneasily, and uneasily rubbed his knee.

Captain Brazenhead shook his sword at him. "Say the *Credo*, thou toe-fingered mock man, say the *Credo*, or I lop thee into fire-wood lengths, for the doubter I believe thee." By a pardonable confusion he had supposed him the atheist of the party, and was greatly surprised.

"*Credo in unum deum omnipotentem*," the fellow quavered forth, and finished without a throw-back. By force of habit his yokemates quired *Amen*.

So far the wretch had cleared himself. "This is indifferent well," admitted his executioner, and bent frowning brows upon Lo Spagna, considering how he should most surely convict him of sin. "Now listen to me," said he, sure of his man. "Thou hast crossed the Bidassoa."

Accusation of an unheard of crime caused the little man to dance up and down, like a bear asking for supper. He protested vehemently.

"Never, my lord, by all my hopes! I would not do it. I should shame to do it. Oh, that I should

live to be accused of such a deed. I am an old Christian, my lord, a very old Christian, and the only cross I know is that of salvation." He began to chant: "*O Crux! O Crux spes unica! O lignum vitæ, stirps Davidis! O sæcula sæculorum!*" and looking keenly up: "You see that I have my clergy."

But the Captain spurned him. "I see that thou art a very vile Biscayan, clergyman or none. Yet for the sake of a little person, known to me in Bilboa, when I was there in '89, thou shalt fight with me for thy deplorable life. I had believed thee an atheist, upon my soul, and had a cord for thy wry neck. 'Tis better for thee to be a one-armed ape of Spain than so outrageous a fellow. Hold thee still now, while I loose thy fetter."

The little man was loosed, and slowly, pleasurably straightened himself.

"By stretching," said the Captain, "thou mightest reach my nipple yet. Horrid food for thee there, Biscayan. Take now what blade thou wilt. This of Ferrara is the longest; have thou that. Stay a little. Tie me up my right arm with this cord, wherewith I shall shortly strangle the atheist when I have found him. Tie me close, dog. Dost thou think that I would crow over a Biscayan the less?"

Deftly Lo Spagna bound him up, and they began their bout. The other pair, squatting by the pillar, watched and wondered and hoped greatly.



The Biscayan, if such he was, proved himself a marvel of his age and nation. Such agility, lightning advance and retreat, thrust and parry, had scarcely been seen since Bernard del Carpio engaged the dwarf Malimart. He would run in, drive and duck; then turn and fly like the wind. Such were his tactics. Twice Captain Brazenhead, thinking to have him, chased him round the limits of the well. But Lo Spagna ran so fast that he caught his enemy up. Pursuer became pursued; the unchivalrous might have said it was the greater man who ran, the justiciar who fled from justice; but we know that it could not have been so. Pursuing who might, they ran like greyhounds: then to it again, one, two, one, two, until for a third time the Biscayan, stooping, ran in and delivered his point. Turning immediately, he ran, his fate after him. Captain Brazenhead chased Lo Spagna; Lo Spagna sped faster and chased Captain Brazenhead. Then suddenly, as they slipped round like beetles in a cask, the Egyptian edged out a foot and brought the Captain down. Was this treason? I fear it. Lo Spagna buffeted into him and flew over his head, his length on the floor. Immediately Captain Brazenhead arose, set his foot on the other's chest, and nicked the point of his sword into his throat.

"I dig—thou diest—is a good verb and an active verb. Phew! Bilboan, thou art a monarch of the chase. Say thy prayers now, say thy prayers, for I must kill a man this day—and why not thee? But that none shall say that I deal unfairly by a

fine little rogue; have at thee left-handed. Now beware."

The Biscayan writhed under the sword's point. "One word, one word, noble enemy," he faintly urged.

"Say on, dead man." It had been fine to have watched the Egyptian just then—the pondering, sphinx-like face he had.

"That little person of my people known to your Excellency—had she a red poll?"

Thus far the Biscayan. The Captain's eyes grew dreamy.

"It was something reddish. There was a tang. I know that I called her Judas when I was merry, and Foxy when she crossed me."

"And her eyes, noble sir? Her pair eyes?"

"They were not what you would call a pair," said the Captain. "But one was well enough, inclining to the yellow. With that she could make pretty work, I assure you."

"And so she could," the Bilboan said; "and I should know it, for she was my aunt."

Starting, Captain Brazenhead, somewhat recoiled, and in so doing plucked his sword out of Lo Spagna's neck with the kind of noise you make when you draw a cork. A spasm of pain contracted the prisoner's features; but in his eyes hope shone bright.

As for Captain Brazenhead, he knew that he must once more have mercy.

"Cock's body, and is the world so paltry small?" The sword's point dropped nerveless

to the ground. "I spare thee, Bilboan, for thy aunt's merry sake. Thou may'st bless her name in thy prayers."

"She was a fine woman," said the little man, sitting up and closing the wound in his neck. "May she go with God!"

"She was a knowing one," replied Brazenhead. He turned to his business. "Into the sack with thee, Barbary, and lie quiet until I have done with those pampered rogues." Here the Egyptian wetted his lips.

"Sir," said the Biscayan, "I will help you there, if I may, for my aunt's sake."

"By Cock, and you shall!" the hero cried. "A main! a main! Three arms to four! Stand up, you drolls!"

He turned short upon the chained men, who were already on their feet, a murderous couple: the one, a square-headed, heavy man of past middle life, with hanging chops, and not a hair upon him; the other, the Egyptian, hatchet-faced, lithe, and walnut-brown, with restless eyes which could never meet yours, and tight lips never soothed by smiling. The bigger was enormously strong. His muscles rippled as he moved, like incoming waves. The younger was all wire and brain; no ruth was in either, nor law, nor quarter. Captain Brazenhead sized them up and down when he had set them free.

"Now, my bravoes," he said, "we shall have sport. You know my way, and if ever I saw rufflers, ambushmen behind a hedge, or outlaws

in a clump of scrub, then do I know your way also." He flung two swords with a generous gesture at their feet, then balanced his own. "Take your fancy, little men, and get to work. There's light enough for the game we play, and a rare game it shall be."

The Bilboan lined up with him, and he set on with a shout.

CHAPTER VII

DOUBLE BATTLE

It was rare, very rare; a game for the heroes in the trenches about Ilium, when Diomede fought waist-deep in dead men, and yellow-haired Menelaus ranged disconsolate the walls, crying upon the false thief Paris to show himself. From the hush of preparation to Captain Brazenhead's cry of onset was but a moment of long breath; and then immediately the ring was alive with whirling blades, and steel clanged on steel like church bells of an Easter morning. Brazenhead raged like a plunging horse. He seemed everywhere at once—wallowing in his work, snorting, shaking his head. Like a strong swimmer newly in the water, rejoicing to feel the tide, so did he breast the waves of battle. Ever on the look-out for advantage, the Egyptian writhed in and out, or darted like an eel, now this side, now that; and the Bilboan, bending at the knees, ran in where he could and cut left-handed at the heavy Italian. That livid giant was sore beset, and by his breathing betrayed himself. So long as he kept his wind he did well—as when he laid open

Captain Brazenhead's forearm with a smashing blow, and cut down the Bilboan as if he had been a hemlock. But alas for him! even as he roared his triumph Brazenhead set upon him, and mowing at the tendons of his knees, missed his aim indeed, but split open one of his calves horizontally and laid him his length. When one of that party—the Egyptian, I believe—cried a halt, Squarcialupo could not rise above one knee, and then his wounded calf could be seen, notched like a leg of mutton. All the champions were hurt; the Egyptian had lost his ragged ear, and might have been seen shaking the blood out of his head before the fighting stopped. Two fingers the less was the brave Biscayan. Captain Brazenhead might well swing his forearm; but Squarcialupo was down and could fight no more. The conqueror—all duty to his Prince cast to the wind—felt magnanimous, little disposed to insist upon his right.

"Bleed on your sacks; bleed on your sacks, you rogues!" he cried upon his victims, "or how shall I carry you through Milan for dead?"

Grinning at his ruse, they obeyed him. The Captain sat upon the ground and surveyed them.

"Squarcialupo, my old son," he said, "let us take up your business. You broke from your oar, they tell me, and I'll not blame you for it. I would have done the same. But what kind of a fool am I to think you, to be lagged again?"

"Captain," said the Italian hoarsely, looking

with intense interest at the fountain in his leg, "it was done by craft. I am something of a drinker, you must know. Now, as I lay in the sun, sleeping off my draught, the Duke's archers came upon me and knew me again; and I awoke to find myself in this hole."

"Knew thee again, sayst thou?" Brazenhead picked him up. "Explain me that saying, I'll trouble thee."

"I am a Pisan, noble Captain," said Squarcialupo, "and followed the fleet, making war upon the Genoese; and when I was rifling a corpse—as it might be you or me—it turned out to be no corpse at all, but a quicker man than I was. So they chained me to a bench in the galleys, and there I sweated for six years less one. Therefore, sir——"

"Therefore! Therefore! No therefore at all, thou paltry fellow," the Captain roared, sternly frowning. "What have thy beastly habits to do with my question? 'Twas Genoa chained thee to a bench—and Genoa was wise. But if they knew thee again in Milan, they had known thee of old."

"Why yes, sir," the heavy Italian replied; "long ago, when I took the old Duke Barnaby's pay for the war in Piedmont——"

"Bleed on your sack!" the Captain interrupted him. "Bleed on your sack! See what a quag you make out here!"

"And valiantly I should have served him but for an evil acquaintance I made. For in his

service there was a spearman, a most rascally knave, if not the devil in person, who beguiled me with hopes of high renown combined with comfort. Sir, he was the plausiblest, God-bless-you kind of a man that ever you saw—and you will have seen many——"

Captain Brazenhead's face was a study at this time. Profound meditation, humour, judgment, acquaintance with villainy, benevolence: all knowledge could be read there. He covered his mouth with his hand, his hand with his nose, and his eyes twinkled as if to say: "Proceed, son."

"And says this sly one to me over the camp-fire: 'Hark ye, jail-bird'—for he had a pleasant name for everybody—'knowst thou aught of a convoy that comes this way?' 'A convoy?' says I. 'What convoy?' Just like that I said it, civil-spoken; and says he: 'Treasure, hire for the troops'; and lays his finger along his nose, as you might do."

It so happened that Captain Brazenhead was doing exactly that, and no less. The coincidence startled him; he dropped his hand and began to hum an air.

The Italian resumed. "'And what of that?' says myself; 'We have our share, I suppose?' Says he darkly, 'Look to it that we do.' To be brief with you, sir, he did beguile me into a dark venture—me and a company of eight Christians,—that with horses and arms we went up the sea-road some six leagues, by night, and there lay hid

in a little wood, and stood by our arms all night, and heard him tell tales—this wily, hairy man. And in the grey of dawn came the convoy down the sea-road, a round dozen of men-at-arms, with the treasure on mules' backs; and at the word of command: 'Leap, ye thousand devils!' out we did leap, and put those men to the sword; and the muleteers fled, believing that hairy man's word that we were a thousand—though we were but eight Christians and one devil."

Captain Brazenhead cheered the speaker: "O brave! It was bravely done, my brother!"

"Not so brave as you might suppose," said the Italian, with grief thickening his voice. "When we came to share the plunder, what think you fell to me out of all that bounty untold? Three *sols* Tournois, as I'm a hoping soul—and if I had remained snug in camp I had had fifty. But, said that deceiver, I was the best-nourished man he had ever set eyes on, and therefore——"

"'Therefore' will be thy ruin, Demetrio," said Captain Brazenhead. "I gave you four, which is enough for any man not a leader of a company. But now, look you, I spare your life for the sake of old friendship. You shall go alive into that sack, and drink my health this night in a flagon or two of right liquor—you, man, who, but for my clemency, might have been paddling upon red-hot bricks, mingling fires for your new prince, Beelzebub. Think of it, Demetrio, and rejoice greatly—and there's for you and your

three *sols* Tournois. For I'll go into the fire myself for it that I gave you the four."

Sedately, with a very stiff leg, the large Italian crawled into his sack, and lay hidden there beside the Biscayan, who was by this time asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD, AGAINST HIS BETTER JUDGMENT, SPARED THE EGYPTIAN

THE Egyptian, who had been lying his length upon the sack destined, as he hoped, to receive him alive, and who had lost nothing of the conversations between his fellow-prisoners and their great opponent, now arose to his feet and came wheedling to Captain Brazenhead.

"You shall spare me also, noble Captain, if you please, to be a credit to you yet."

"That," said Captain Brazenhead, "will you never be."

The Egyptian sighed. "Who knows?" he inquired. "Sir, if you will but listen to my tale——"

The Captain frowned upon him. "Fair and softly with your tale," he said. "Why should I listen to thee, rascal, since thou must die?"

"Die, Captain! Oh, Captain!" The Egyptian shivered.

"Aye," said Brazenhead, "die is the word." He was irritated with the man. "Cock's wounds!" he cried out, "am I executioner to

the Duke of Milan, and execute no man? Is it to be said of me: 'Testadirame is an unprofitable servant?' Never in life! Dog, thou diest!"

The Egyptian shook like a straw in the wind. "But, sir, having spared the life of a Spanish renegado——" he began to plead.

"Pooh!" says the Captain. "I played with his aunt."

"Alas!" said the Egyptian, "alas! that I am an orphan! But so it is that when I left Lutterworth in fair, green England——" Here he paused and scanned the stern man's face to see if Lutterworth were to help him. It was not; he had touched no chord. Captain Brazenhead's features were marble.

"Proceed, Egyptian," he said; "I listen. When thou leftest Lutterworth——"

"When I left Lutterworth, and went to seek my fortune in London, I lived happily enough with a brave company gathered in Houndsditch, in the fields there and about the 'Old Cat' tavern—does your honour not remember Catherine—Kate Wryneck, called also 'Drink to me only?'"

Captain Brazenhead spoke as one in a dream. "I do not," he said. "Get on!"

The Egyptian, most uneasy, shifted his ground. "Alack the day, noble Captain, in the which I left that proud city and went down with a horse to sell—to Bristol——"

Captain Brazenhead started, snorted, and pounced upon him.

"That horse thou stolest, vile thief! He is

branded on thy shoulder; thou art a dead man. A flea-bitten white gelding—that screwed the off hind foot——"

"Oh, sir, oh, sir!" cried the Egyptian, falling on his knees. "That horse was never yours!" His case was parlous; you may touch the chords too often, it seems. But no!

"By Cock, and it was not," said the Captain, "but I knew the horse. The man that owned it—or called himself the owner——"

"Aye, sir," said the young man, with gleaming eyes—"aye, sir, right, sir—so he called himself; but he lied, sir."

"I'll warrant that he did," said Brazenhead; "for he was not called Glossy Tom for nothing. Well, then——" Hesitation marked for the first time his incisive lineaments and dissipated the lightning of his eyes.

The Egyptian considered his case settled. "Since I prove to be of the number of your friends, dear sir," he ventured—but too hastily. The Captain recoiled.

"A friend, thou!" He towered over the man. "I fancied the horse, 'tis true, and thou wast beforehand with me. Pooh! I had but to stretch out mine hand. And now I remember that thou art a horrible knave. Didst thou not address Our Lady in an unknown tongue full of blasphemy? Horse or no horse, I tell thee that thou diest."

Trembling, looking all ways for help, muttering with his pale lips, the wretched Egyptian

faltered. "It was the tongue I know best, noble Captain. I am a very pious Christian, better than some who have their Latin. I spoke in the Roman to her Ladyship—and she heard me. I prove that, sir, I prove that!" His eyes gleamed; you could see the whites of them. "The proof she heard me," he said, "is that you are here, her lieutenant in this wicked place—yourself an Englishman——"

"By the Mass," replied the Captain, "all this may be very true, and yet be woundily inconvenient."

He held his chin, and this time the young man believed himself snatched out of the pit. He came forward obsequiously, bending at the knees. Captain Brazenhead roared at him to hold off.

"I forswear my nation!" he cried. "I become Lombard! I will embrace Jewry before I let thee go!"

But it was too late. The Egyptian now held him by the knee. "Captain," prayed he, "noble Captain, you will never break a man who got the better of you in a horse-deal."

"Who says that I will not?" And yet he was touched. If he could spare Squarcialupo of whom he had made a fool, how not this oily rogue who had made a fool of him? And it was not to be denied the fellow had fought for his skin. Captain Brazenhead had it not in him to take life in the cool of his bile. He was so made that he, who would cut a man's liver out of him

in fair fighting, came afterwards to love his enemy if he had so much as scratched him. He knew this was a weakness. "Look you," he was wont to say to his opponent. "If you would save yourself from me, wound me where you can. I consider you carrion at this speaking, but he who draws my blood wears armour of proof for me. Now, then, have at you, soldier!"

Meditating his own nature and deploring it, muttering to himself, "Mayhap I do wrong—I do grudge this fellow his mercy—upon my soul I do grudge it him," Captain Brazenhead remained intensely in thought for many minutes, his head sunk upon his breast, his arms folded. At last, as if suddenly awaking out of sleep, he threw his chin up and stamped with his foot. "Into your sack, you black-livered hound! May Hell forgive me the wrong I do him this day, and count it not against me when mine cometh!" It was a sight to see how the Egyptian slipped in—like a terrier into kennel when the whip is whistling.

There, then, for good or evil, in their sanguine wrappings, lay the three ransomed men; there over them, like a meditative god, stood Captain Brazenhead, with a hand to grasp his chin, and one finger of it to rake in his moustachios. He set a foot upon the round of a sack; deeply, profoundly, he thought upon mercy, justice, judgment, the weighing of souls and such-like themes; and here, if you will have it, is a summary of his reflection.

"Now have I here ensacked four indifferent

rascals bound straitly to my person by cords of steel. They worship me as the author of their being, as in a sense I am. No doubt they would follow me all over the world; a bodyguard the like of which the Duke of Milan might pray for night and day—and with him all long Italy." His eye flashed fire. "Long Italy! Long Italy! By their means I make good the soothsay that I heard in the tavern of Pavia when, with my foot upon Lisciassangue's remains, I vaunted, *There lies long Italy.*

"It was true, by Cock, for all that, when I spake, I spake as in a glass, darkly. Aye, darkly, but it was true. For see me now! To each of my four scoundrels there will adhere—like ticks to a sheep's back—lesser scoundrels, to each one ten at least. That gives me four-and-forty desperate men; and with forty men you may take a gatehouse—and hold it, by Cock's body! Nay, you may get by shock a town, as my lord John Swynford got Coulanges in Brittany on a foggy night of Martinmas, and became Viscount thereof, and sweated meat out of the burgesses, and honey out of their wives, and levied toll upon all and sundry faring that way into France, and took to wife Melisette, daughter of Simon de Fotz, and got a son, who is Viscount of Coulanges to this day. Viscount of Coulanges—Viscount of Pavia! Put it so that I catch Pavia unawares and become its Viscount—what then? A royal beginning! We begin with Pavia. . . .

"Every male of Pavia, of proper age and fully

membered, following my banner, we lay siege to Milan. The sooner the better; for that old dog-fox Sforza is warring in Umbria, and I could not cope with Sforza until I have all my Pavians matched and in full bearing—say, for twelve years at the least. Nay, Brazenhead, nay, Testadirame, my ancient, strike thy metal while 'tis hot. . . .

"Milan falls—Milan falls! And there's the thigh of Italy under my thigh!

"Now Rome, the city old, lies about the knee of Italy—is, as you may say, the knee-cap; and Venice is the hamstring. Let me work it out, let me work it out. You cut the hamstring, and the knee gives, and the leg drops. Venice gives me Rome; Naples is the toe. Cut the hamstring; the knee is nerveless; then gangrene assails the toe, and it fritters and falls off. But with Milan to add to Pavia, who is to keep me from Venice? Pooh! I lead a host. To-morrow, therefore, to the shock of Pavia!"

He swept the mist of glory from his eyes; he lifted his head and bellowed for his men—those dread apparitors who hover in Milan, who sit about the jails, like vultures patient on their trees about a battlefield, awaiting the summons to their obscene task.

One by one the crimson heaps were lifted out of the well of Santa Chiara; lastly Captain Brazenhead himself set his foot into the grappling-hook and swung aloft. The tumbril-cart was loaded with its sodden load; the executioner sat

down upon the pile and ordered the disposal of his dead. In a disused hermitage in the burial-ground of Sant' Eustorgio, he chose to hide his three recruits, and to add to them Tranche-coupe, the stout Burgundian. Means were found to victual the garrison, which, sworn to secrecy and commended to the gods of war and good luck, their leader then left—going, as his duty was, to make his report to the Duke.

CHAPTER IX

HOW AND WHERE CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD, FALLING INTO DISGRACE, READ HIS "DE REMEDIO"

"TYRANT of Milan"—thus ran his Third Murderer's report—"one wretch I seized by the ankles, as if he had been a three-legged stool, and whirling him over my head a few times, with him attacked those other two. As a flail I brought him thwacking down; as wheat from the chaff on the floor fled brain from husk. The time was not long before they lay before me like the must of trodden grapes; while as for him I wielded, he was as whip-thongs in my hand—strips of hide wherewith to trounce a truant, but no weapon for a man. Anon came my varlets to sweep up with a besom, and now your well of Santa Chiara is so sweet you could stable there your store pig."

Visconti, burning and shivering by turns in his fever, hugged his furs about him and spread out his thin hands to the sun. He may have listened, but he did not heed; he may have been gratified, but he did not seem to be. Captain Brazenhead's invention, for lack of nourishment, wilted and faltered out. His eloquence, for that

turn, was not ready at call—or it may be that his patron had heard it all before. When the best is said, the variations you can play upon the death of a man are very few, at least in Europe. They say that the Chinese have contrived better, or perhaps they have greater vitality to work upon. However that may be, Captain Brazenhead stopped —and there followed a painful pause.

Presently Visconti croaked out his doom. "You have done very ill on your own showing. To dispose of three men by knocking their heads together—what is this but insensate butchery. Get you to the knacker's, hire yourself in the shambles, but serve me no more. Yet stay," he added, seeing that Brazenhead was preparing to obey him with suspicious alacrity, "I may have use for you yet. You are confined to quarters until my next orders, and you are disarmed."

Then and there the Halberdiers deprived him of his weapons; he was led to the door and turned loose into the corridors of the Castle, a disgraced man. I must observe upon this that it is not given to the most generous to foresee the full scope of their magnanimity; or it may well be that our Brazenhead's circle of acquaintance was too wide or his instincts too warm to make him a tolerable murderer. For if every murderer were to fight with the men he proposed to slay, the work would never be done; and if you are to add to a zest for combat a tenderness towards the nephews of ladies with whom you may have conversed, or are inclined to spare them who may have bested you

as well as those whom you have bested, you narrow the field of your operations too severely. It is likely you will murder none. Add the difficulty of explaining how you have slain persons who are alive at the moment of explanation, and you put a tax upon your invention which may easily make you bankrupt.

* * * * *

It was vexatious in every way—humiliating to his finer feelings and embarrassing to his political schemes. He had his garrison in Sant' Eustorgio to provide for; he had fixed the day for the shock of Pavia; and here he was, deprived of arms and confined to the precincts of the Court, while his friends starved in a disused hermitage and Pavia remained inviolate. This was trouble enough, but the hurt to his pride, his professional pride, was worse. To Camus and Gelsomino, his colleagues, was allotted the notable adventure of putting three hundred Anabaptists to the sword. Not only so, but on the day fixed the Duke himself would attend the shambles in state. Milan would hold high festival; and so it did. Fortified by proof armour and a ring with prussic acid in the jewel of it, Duke Galeazzo set out. His Duchess, his daughter, his great officers, suitably accompanied, took horse in the great court, and rode down to the piazza. Captain Brazenhead saw them go from where he sat in an obscure corner of the buttery, and bit his nails to the quick. Occasionally he sipped a mug of small beer, very occasionally he tried to carry his misfortune with grace by

humming an air. But he never got beyond the first bar. He had been thus pitifully engaged for more than a week, and was very glum.

A thin stream of persons of both sexes was maintained throughout the day, to and from the buttery.

Mendicant friars came to fill their sleeves with broken victuals, widows and orphans, half-pay soldiers, murderers out of work, and other unfortunates, received their daily sustenance from the overflowings of the kitchens. But for them the Castle had been like a house of the dead, for the whole Castle world was gone to see the slaying of the Anabaptists. Captain Brazenhead watched them now darkly from his corner, chewing a bitter cud and reading a soured judgment upon every comer.

Upon a rosy-gilled Franciscan he mused: "Aye, thou scratching dog, filch the substance of the poor and score the crime against thy god of Assisi. Him thou professest to serve; in his wounded side thou hopest to hide, as thou sayest. And yet, I tell thee, that little beggar-man had not been cold two-and-fifty weeks before thou and thy likes were like fed stallions. Get thee hence, thou cheek of brawn, and vex not the sight of the honest." And with some such scathing words he was ready for every religious who came to get much for little.

By-and-by there came in a pretty young woman in a striped petticoat, leading by the hand a short-smocked child. She approached the

buttery-hatch modestly, and not perceiving Captain Brazenhead in his corner, stumbled against him, and would have fallen had she not sat down upon his knee. The moment she perceived her error she begged his pardon.

Confusion once more became her; she was tinged like a flower. Captain Brazenhead, for all his dejection, knew her at once.

"Ah, gentle Liperata," said he, "you may well be ashamed of the seat you chose. A time there was when these war-wasted knees would have become you better. No doubt you remember how we journeyed together the way of Milan—and with what hopes, odd's face! and what promise! But then Fortune smiled upon me, though you did not."

"Sir," said the young woman, "at that time I should never have sat upon your knee, for then I was a wife. Now, alas——!"

"How now?" cried the Captain. "Has thy husband forsaken so lovely a partner? Bring me face to face with him, and I will embrace him."

The lady began to cry; she snatched up her child and clasped it to her bosom.

"Behold an orphan! Behold the widow of a murdered man!" she wailed.

Captain Brazenhead was awake and vibrating with fire.

"Who is the murdered man? Confront me with his killer, and thou shalt have two murdered men," he cried. "I have a sword not yet rusty, and by this hand——"

He had forgotten that he was weaponless, and was to have good reason anon to remember it.

"Sir," said Liperata, "I will tell you my tale if you will be pleased to hear it. I was but yesterday the wife of a gentleman of position and talent, who had a Court appointment which brought him honour, respect, and a handsome emolument. His name was Camus——"

"Camus!" the Captain whispered hoarsely. "Camus! My colleague! Oh, Fate, thou avenger of wrong! Proceed, fair widow, I conjure thee."

"My husband," said Liperata, "had been entrusted with a responsible task which he must fulfil this very day——"

"Aye," said the Captain, "and so he must. Three hundred Anabaptists await him. But now—what may not come of this?"

"He felt the burden laid upon him as one which called for all his powers of head, heart, and sinew," she continued, "and devoted the whole of yesterday to the exercise of these parts of his. He spent the forenoon in the reading of theology; Saint Thomas Aquinas equipped him here. His heart was in my care. I think I may say, without affectation, that I lavished upon it all the arts which a good and dutiful wife has at her command. At least, he praised me, and assured me that I had not worked in vain."

"I warrant that you did not, lady," said Captain Brazenhead warmly, and she thanked him with gentleness.

"In the evening of that unhappy yesterday my husband set out for the exercise of his muscular system. With our child upon one arm, and my hand upon the other, he took a walk about the streets of the city, conversing cheerfully with his acquaintances, visiting the shrines of certain saints who had always been propitious. All went well until we passed through the deserted cemetery of Sant' Eustorgio. But in that unhallowed spot——"

The Captain's eyes seemed starting from his head.

"Which of them did it?" he said, and his voice was like the sea-sound in a shell. "Not Tranche-coupe? Not Squarcialupo? Not a long-armed man?"

"A dusky youth, lithe as a snake," said she, "sprang upon him from behind a grave, and crying: 'Here's for thee, Braggart of England!' stabbed him in the neck. He could not have chosen a more fatal spot. It was the heel of my dear Achilles—my noble, diligent Achilles, of whom I am the poor Briseis of his arms. For my husband, whose profession exposed him to constant danger, wore chain mail upon his person, which unhappily ended at the shoulders. Need I say more? He sank, bathed in his own bright blood, and as I wrung my hands and cried upon my Camus by name, the villain slipped among the tombs and disappeared into the city. I am bereft of his love, and he, by failing of his tryst to-day, has died dishonoured. If my tears have

earned your pity, sir, I am glad, for indeed I need the pity of the humane. Now, with no prospect before me but a life of beggary and want, I am come here for alms, that I may school myself at once for the bitter end of my days."

She covered her face with her hands, but Captain Brazenhead was moved to the very centre of his being.

"But not so, by Cock's wounds, not so," he said, and laid a well-chopped finger along his nose. "What if I can amend your griefs, my bird of the bough? What of bearded men, old in warfare? What of the ties of gratitude? Bands of steel? No more——" And here he clasped the melting fair to his breast, while all the hangers about the buttery marvelled, and many wept. "Come you with me, lady, come you out along with me. 'Twas to-morrow for Pavia, pity is, but now it must be later. Now I am Persia and thou art my Andromedary. Now we summon the legionaries for chivalry, and off we go, my chuck!"

With no more words, but with husbanded breath and an arm crooked for her hand, he led her away to the cemetery of Sant' Eustorgio.

CHAPTER X

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD SLEW THREE HUNDRED ANABAPTISTS WITH THE THIGH-BONE OF A PHILOSOPHER

THE tombs of Sant' Eustorgio stood or leaned at all angles and stared like the bleached and derelict bones of a host long dead. Disconsolate kites, buzzards, ravens, and other reprobate birds flapped heavily above or, perching on cross or pinnacle, voiced after their fashion their discontent with the world as it was. The crazy *Hic Jacets* of the tombs coincided with these harsh-throated heralds of despair, and set Captain Brazenhead to stalk briskly about, himself like a long-necked bird of omen, if haply he might discover but one of his bond-slaves. Clinging to his arm was the now terrified Liperata, upon whose skirts dragged the child of slain Camus.

"I pin my faith to the Bilboan," said Brazenhead, "for he alone is fitted by his nature to inhabit so beastly a spot. His arm reaches to his knee-cap; he is, you may say, three-legged. No hyæna could be more at home in a graveyard than this fellow, who is, moreover, endeared to

me by many ties. He owes me for his life, I owe him for his aunt. Certainly I pin my faith to him."

And he was justified. For within the shade of an empty vault they came upon a crouched figure. His head was not visible, so deeply was it sunk between his knees. But by his arm—by the absence of one, and the presence of one—he could be recognised for the Bilboan.

"Ho, Barbary, awake!" cried Brazenhead, and stirred him with a thigh-bone which he happened to have in his hand. It was no ordinary thigh-bone, though its present possessor knew nothing of that. Being deprived of his sword, and missing the handling of it, he had picked it up in his way through the cemetery. It had belonged to the philosopher Gnatho of Samothrace, who had devoted his life to demonstrating the indestructibility of matter, and had perished at the stake in the great days of Saint Ambrose, to whom matter was so little that he considered the punishment a light one. It was a curious circumstance that Captain Brazenhead was to be the instrument of Gnatho's vindication—if indeed those modern disciples of the sage are not nearer the mark when they affirm that he himself was his own instrument, and Captain Brazenhead the unconscious agent of his purpose.

But at the smart touch of the relic the Bilboan came leaping from the tomb and humbled himself at the feet of his lord. His uncouth mops and mows touched Captain Brazenhead in a quick spot.

"My faithful vassal," said he tenderly, "how is it with thee, man? Art thou alone faithful to thy Brazenhead? Is gratitude, then, so dear? Are memories so short? Where is Squarcialupo, that prick-eared Roman?"

"Gone, master, gone," said the Bilboan. "A gamester came this way and did beguile him."

The Captain was shocked. "How now? So sturdy a knave!"

"He promised him good wages," said the other. "Five *sols* Tournois per diem. I cried shame upon him, saying: 'Trust to our lord's honour'; but he said your rate had been but three."

"It was four!" cried the Captain. "I pass you my word it was four!"

The Bilboan shrugged in despair. "Even so," said Squarcialupo, "five was above your figure; and he went the day after you had brought him here."

Captain Brazenhead had expected as much. "He was a gallows' knave, when all's said. But I hope better things of Tranche-coupe. Now what of that Burgundian?"

"There came a funeral to this place," said the Bilboan, "on Saint Milo's day. They buried a certain notary, a warm man, but not near so warm as that heathen is, whose thigh-bone your honour now wears at your side, if all they tell me of his teaching is but half true. Now, to commit our notary to earth came a widow of his and ten

children, if not more. Quite a company! Their lamentable cries did so move Tranche-coupe our friend, that he brooded upon them day and night. The affair got into his mind and wrought upon the young man's brain; so presently, moved by pity, he borrowed a suit of clothes from the grave-digger, and is but this morning gone to pay court to the relict of the notary. If he succeeds, as I think he will from what he tells me, he will be fourth husband to a lady of substance and merit. I cannot blame him neither; for a widow, d'ye see, has experience in the comforting of mankind, and that counts for much with a young man of Tranche-coupe's years. No, no, I cannot blame him."

"Nor I," said Captain Brazenhead, constricting the muscles of his arm and looking benignantly down upon Liperata. "No, nor I, by cock. But I am vexed," he added, "and something put about—for I had reckoned upon his cross-bow arm for an adventure of Pavia before long. There shun me two men by whom I had hoped to win a score. Tush! And the Egyptian——"

"Master," said the Bilboan, darkly, "come we now to the Egyptian, against whom I would have warned you before had I seen you here or known how to come at you. That dark-skinned rogue, that snake-tongue, who got the better of your Honour once in a horse-deal, has now done you the scurviest turn of all. For not content with the slaughter of Signior Camus,

your colleague, he has dressed himself out in his livery, and with the murdered man's visor to cover his own false face, is engaged at this hour in slaughtering three hundred Anabaptists in the presence of the Duke's grace of Milan, and his consort, and his daughter, and all his court."

At this intelligence Captain Brazenhead smote himself on his forehead, and said, "It was very well." Those who knew him would have read the oracle for a bad sign, because he really meant it. Its deep-mouthed tones rang the passing-bell for the Egyptian.

"Come," said Captain Brazenhead sternly to the Bilboan. "I shall need thee. Come." So saying, he led the way back to the Castle of Milan.

Walking through a desert city into a desert stronghold, it came upon him as a providence of supernatural powers that all lay so snug—"at the mercy of any man of his hands." A sombre cheer illuminated his burnt face; he put his arm round the waist of Liperata and pressed her to his heart. With the other arm free, he flourished the thigh-bone of Gnatho, the Philosopher. "All may yet be done; all may fall out still for the best. By the Sacred Places of Jerusalem, I see my way! Forward!"

It was very much the hero, it was *de son naturel*, to overlook the exiguity of his little force. True, the great Sforza was far away. That right hand of Milan, with the flower of the Lombard host, was warring in Umbria, it was believed, engaged

just now in the leaguer of Perugia. Even so, it needs a mind cast in a Paladin's mould to compass the sack of Milan with a one-armed man, a young widow, and an unbreeched boy for attacking party. But Captain Brazenhead would never perish of dry-rot in the brain. If great schemes, great enthusiasms had been all, he might have realised that grandiose conception of Castruccio's, who, having Lucca under his hand, saw his way to the tyranny of all Italy.

More sanguine than Castruccio himself, the swelling thought held him in thrall as he led his band into the Hall of Audience, which was in the shape of a basilica of three aisles. These aisles were marked by columns of the Doric order, grey and serried. In the apse of the noble chamber, upon it degrees, stood the Throne of Milan—empty. To stride forward, mount the steps, seat himself in that chair of State, place Liperata upon his left hand, made but short work for a man whose brain was on fire. He bade the child group himself by a column; and then, in the clear voice of a man who has a vision, commanded the Bilboan to proclaim him Duke of Milan. We may call that burning your ships—or we may call it high treason—or both. The question is, had Captain Brazenhead, or had he not, the quick sprite Destiny by the tail? Now, Captain Brazenhead thought that he had.

"Salomon, by the grace of God, Duke of Milan, Marquess of Pavia, Lord of Monza, Como, Bergamo and Brescia, Tyrant of Verona,

Piacenza and the Borrommean Isles," was called by the herald and acclaimed by the populace—that is the orphan child; and a reign, the shortest but most eventful in the annals of the Lombard State, was peacefully ushered in. Not trumpets pealed its opening, nor the clash of lifted swords, nor pikes tossing like reeds in a wind. The piping of an unbreeched child for his mother was all the acclamation, and the fevered agitation of his legs, as he pattered up and down the pavement, all the commotion of a scene which needed, perhaps, but a little more bustle to have been memorable by Corio and the other Court historians of the houses of Visconti and Sforza, who, as things were, and for reasons of their own, passed it over.

I have no such reasons, and am proud to be the humble means of restoring a stirring page to the volume of Lombard story. It would be my wish to enlarge upon the events of the twenty-five minutes following the proclamation (and its reception by the populace) which I have just related, and I am sure it would be the reader's; but materials are wanting. *Caetera desunt*, as the chroniclers say. I believe that the Civil List was established, provision made for the Duchess-elect Liperata, and the tax on beer, spruce, cider, perry, wine, mead and all fermented liquors, abolished. The marriage laws were standardised, I gather: but for such high matters space fails me.

Now, the issuing of these important and far-reaching reforms took up the better part of five-and-twenty minutes; and immediately after, just

as the new Duke, feeling the vein leap within him, was about to deliver an apologue upon Equity, a confused murmuring afar off, the noise of a great tumult without the house, made itself heard. It was for all the world like the sound of a mighty flood, gathered in the mountains, and sweeping its way irresistible over the plain. All heard it, some shook; the Duke paused in the act to speak. His mouth was open, his eyes were fixed; but no rhapsody came forth. Quite otherwise.

"Did I name Equity?" he said. "Here cometh our little affair. Equity's bane this will be—a more ancient practice. Haste thee, Bilboan, and draw thy blade." This was all very well; but the Bilboan, no better than his master, had no blade.

Duke Brazenhead saw his penury and was not long amending it. With his trusty bone in hand he attacked the throne where his Duchess yet sat, and was not long in knocking off a fluted column of marble and mosaic, of the kind known as *opus alexandrinum*. It was of the length of a man's forearm, as sharp at the angles as if it had just left the mason's yard. "Arm thee, friend," he said, "with this emblem until thou hast a better for thy prowess." Descending then into the hall, he caught up the child, and returned and set him upon his mother's knee. "Stay you there, mother and son," he bade them. "I fight for hearth and home this day." Accompanied by the Bilboan, he took the middle aisle of the basilica and stood there, a superb figure of a man, masked,

hairy, bristling, his scarlet cloak thrown over his left arm, and in his restless right hand the avenging limb of Gnatho of Samothrace. The Bilboan, true to his nature, crouched, peering forward. He bent himself at the knees, as an athlete does at the starting-point—but so far that he could easily scratch his ankle with his forefinger ; and he did so more than once.

The uproar in their hearing, who waited, neared, swelled, and became a din—a riot of broken clamour. You could hear now and again the name of the late Duke thrown up : "Visconti ! Visconti !" you heard ; but that cry was drowned in outland curses, and names unknown to Italy held the air. Sooner than was convenient, the noise of countless running feet blotted out all others. It became evident that a host was at hand.

"It is the Anabaptists," said the Bilboan, scratching his foot.

"Aye," said his master. "They drive back Milan. Now we have it in the nose. Be thou ready."

The doors were pushed open wide ; a few scared servants, varlets and maids of the pantry and kitchen, came first—old tirewomen, old bedeswomen, a priest, and a limping page whose ankle was bound up—running helter-skelter for protection. Regardless in their terror, of the stern figures in mid-hall, they pelted by them, and gaining the dais, crouched at the knees of the mother and child on the throne. There was no

marvel in their mistake.—They saw a miracle—and felt it, when Monna Liperata, heavenly mildness beaming from her eyes, put out her hand and laid it upon the head of the nearest. The heart of Duke Brazenhead leaped in his body, and warm tears flooded his eyes as he witnessed this fair sight. "As God liveth, I have that for which to fight this day."

Close upon these stragglers, however, came the halberdiers of the Visconti, a mere handful of striped men backing into the hall, disputing the passage with them who pursued. In their midst, white and slavering at the lips, tottered he who but that morning had been Lord and Tyrant of Milan; beside him his Duchess walked, a goddess, though she was too portly to be fair; and with her came Bianca, her only daughter, *matre pulchra filia pulchrior.* Royally these two advanced up the hall; and behind them, blocking up the great entry, was a thicket of pikes, staves, scythes, and bills, the snatched-up weapons of the wholly frantic and partially naked persons of the Anabaptists. The battling of this shaggy host at the doors, where without order or judgment all tried to enter at once, gave a moment's respite to the pursuers.

Captain Brazenhead—to call him still by his familiar name—had pity upon the fallen and abject prince, and more than pity—high admiration, indeed—for the persons of the two noble ladies of his household. "Open ranks!" he bade the Bilboan; "open ranks, messmate, and let in this

jerking wretch. He was a king this morning," he added pitifully, "and shall sleep in a bed for ought I care." The Bilboan dutifully stood aside, and the hunchback, blind with panic, crawled on all fours up the degrees of his ancient throne, and seeing there a fair woman seated, with a golden-headed child on her lap, stumbled forward with a cry to her feet, clutched at her knees, and buried his face in her striped petticoat. There, throughout the carnage to ensue, he stayed.

But Captain Brazenhead bowed courtly to the Duchess and her daughter. "Ladies," he said, "suffer a soldier, and trust in the clemency of a prince. By your leave, noble ladies, by your leave." So said, he turned to face the throne with them, and taking a hand of each, escorted them with high-stepping gallantry up the steps of it. "Be seated, ladies, beside my family, and be sure that for you, no less than for them, I shall play the man this day." The ladies, who may be pardoned for not knowing, nor caring, what all this might be about, sat beside Liperata on the throne, and saw Captain Brazenhead swoop into the fray, like a sea-eagle into a school of mackerel in a shallow. He had poised on the edge of the dais but for a minute. That had sufficed him to see how matters stood. Visconti's guards were ranged before him; the Bilboan still crouched in mid-hall. Opposite to him raged and bayed the furious host. With a voice like the blast of a trumpet he had signalled for the contest. "Salt and water *en avant!*" he

had cried. "The Anabaptists are at ye, ye hounds! Rally for the Faith!" That bone which erstwhile had stood up stiffly for the indestructibility of matter whistled above his head. "You that love order and good baptism, follow me." The guard rallied and formed a wedge. Led by such a prince, they clove the Anabaptists' ranks, and men dropped like cornstalks heavy in the ear to left and right.

Such battle he had never yet dreamed of—even he, to whom long odds were as a draught of wine—as this, wherein he, the Bilboan, and ten of Visconti's bodyguard faced three hundred fanatics stung by terror into frenzy. Hot-eyed, half-naked, giant men they were—Bulgarians, Croats, and Serbs—red in the beard and flat in the bone, hairy-chested, crying uncouth shibboleths of their own, outraged in every sense, and bent upon outrage. They howled, wept, gnashed their teeth; they thrust and smote, clubbed at their oppressors; but to little purpose. Cut into halves by the wedge of the Lombards, hampered by the pillars of the hall, they impeded each other. In sheaves they fell, or backing in panic at each onrush of the foe they trampled and tumbled over upon the other. Like the uneasy gleams of the sun upon broken water, here and there glided a red figure urging them to effort.

Where, then, was the Egyptian, if not there? Whose was that evil-whispering spirit, if not his? Captain Brazenhead, roaring in the press as he

moved, cried upon him: "Come out, thou horse-coper, thou black thief of Lutterworth! Come out and meet me." But there was no response, save some glancing of the red figure, and no means of getting at that save through the massed Anabaptists about the door. But that caitiff's hours were numbered, and his tale is nearly told. Marked down at last by his incensed adversary, where he stood egging on his dupes to their hopeless task, he was from that moment a doomed man. For Captain Brazenhead, seizing a dead Anabaptist by neck and ankles, lifted him up on high and hurled him with all his force at the Egyptian. The two heads, that of the dead and that of the living, met in horrid shock. That of the Anabaptist stood the strain, but the Egyptian's was split open, as when a man with his finger and fist smashes a walnut. The rogue went down, and was trampled out of recognition by the feet of his flying friends.

CHAPTER XI

HOW, AND FOR WHAT EXQUISITE REASONS, CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD ABDICATED THE THRONE OF MILAN

FOLDING his ragged doublet about his bleeding breast, Captain Brazenhead turned his face towards the dais, where Liperata sat chaste and still, like some fair-haired Madonna of the North. Not upon her only must he look, but he must frown upon the huddled figure of Duke Visconti, and consider what was to be done with him and his. Great and weighty thoughts contended within him as he stood, deep-breathing and deep-pondering, there. At his feet, very contentedly, sat the Bilboan, dabbing his wounds with a rag. Such of Visconti's bodyguard as remained alive waited upon his words.

He was master; he ruled in Milan. At a word from him the writhen little tyrant would be extinguished, and that which he had greatly dreamed would come to pass. Power of life and limb over men, cities, armies, was at his word; more than all these, as hinting at these, and more, the waiting eyes of citizens, the waiting steps of legions, the held breath of neighbouring states

attendant upon his motions. To a man of great ideas and imagination winged, the temptation to say that one word, *Death*, was not, you would say, to have been resisted. *Death to Visconti!* and all Lombardy fell crumbling at his feet.

And yet not only did he not say it, but he knew that he could not. And why? Because he was so made that he could not take life in cold blood. That was one reason. This pitiful, blood-gluttonous, writhen man—whom to kill were to honour above his deserts—must then go free. He might be chained, caged, hidden away within walls; but he could not be slain, because Brazenhead, with everything to gain, could not be angry with him. He could deplore him, despise him, spurn, spit upon him, but treat him as hateworthy he could not for all Milan and its subject cities.

Assume Visconti chained and put away, what was to hinder him then? "By my soul," said he to himself, "when I am Duke of Milan, I must wive; for I must get me a dynasty, d'ye see?" He eyed Visconti's tall daughter as he spoke, and could not deny her merits. "Thou and I, fair dame! O propitious Lucina!" And then he looked at Liperata, where she chastely sat, a mild young goddess. By her side Bianca Visconti showed the termagant, revealed the shrew; yes, but in every feature, in every mould, in carriage, gesture, and regard, there shone a duchess, the mother of dukes to come.

At this crisis in the affairs of Milan, Bianca,

Liperata, and the subduer of them all—the Bilboan limped up to his master, plucked him by the sleeve, and, as the hero stooped to him, whispered hoarsely in his ear. The hushed auditory could make little of the message, which was in the Spanish tongue ; but at one word, out of many, two persons started. These were Bianca Visconti and he who proposed to raise her to a throne. At that one word their looks encountered. Some say the word was *Sforza.*

Captain Brazenhead, at any rate, paused ; for once in his life he showed timidity.

"She is nothing to me beside that mouse in the throne. A man must be snug, d'ye see ? Give me my comforts, and I'll cry you quittance of your strapping ladies. See me at my ease, having well supped, slippers on my feet, plying the toothpick ; what do I need then, ha ? Why, a dove-eyed, ministering, kiss-me-quick lass to sit on my knee and work the whisk to keep the flies away, what time I sleep off my drink. 'Tis so, by Cock ; for men are so made that they carry a maid's heart by storm and waste the world until they have it ; and after that they look to have done with the matter. All must be solace afterwards ; and the woman wooed before wedlock must thereafter woo until the end of days. Men are so made, there's no denying, and I more than most.

"But Madame Bianca there—lo, you ! where is my ease ? Where would she hide my slippers ? Would she flick away flies ? Not so ; but 'My

lord, I pray you fan my face against this heat.' 'My lord, I would have you sing me lullaby.' 'Carry you the child, my lord, while my women tie my hair.' 'Get up, my lord, get up, and snuff the candle; I vow 'tis your turn.' Why, a pest upon it, how should a man find force to lead armies afield, or preside in council-chambers, or beard the envoys of foreign princes, if his rest is to be broken, his pride humbled, his courage frittered off him like cheese off a grater? Yet thus, and not otherwise, must that man suffer who has Madame Bianca to wife. Yet it comports not with my honour to lead any less a lady to the throne of Milan. Zounds, but I'll none of your thrones, then, at such a price. And yet withal—and yet—o-ho, Madame Bianca, I see thee the mother of the dukes my sons!

"A proof, a proof!" he cried. "I'll put all to the proof. Mark you me, Bilboan, how I go a-wooing in my own fashion." Followed by the eyes of his crouching ally, still busy with his sores, he trod impetuously forward to the dais.

There from below he accosted Bianca Visconti, daughter of Dukes.

"Lady, I am Master of Milan, and like you well enough. Come now, shall we make a match of it? Will you be a soldier's wife?"

The lady's eyes shone steely blue. The lady's cheeks flushed high.

"Yes, sir. That is my fixed intention," she said.

Captain Brazenhead set his right foot upon the second degree of the dais.

"Well and good, then, mistress," said he. "Gird me on that forepiece with your belt. It was torn in the fray, and you would not have your husband go barefoot."

Madame Bianca recoiled as if a hornet had stung her.

"Hound!" said she, "do you dare?"

But Liperata slipped from the throne and ran and knelt by the great foot. She took her kerchief from her fair hair and bound the torn forepiece closely to the instep with that. Captain Brazenhead stooped and lifted her in his arms. High in the air she swung, like a feather caught in a tree.

"Behold, behold the wife of a soldier!" cried her taker. Mounting then the throne, he stirred the Duke with his bound foot.

"Ho, there, Milan," he said, "take heart, if thou canst find it. Thy foes are all dead or fled, and as for thy throne, I renounce it with a flick of the finger, as I assumed it with the same. Fortune send thy state bolder tyrants than thee. As for you, mistress," and he turned his face to Madame Bianca, "if you will be a soldier's wife, disdain not to serve him who bleeds. For I care not who the man may be, with him it will never be '*Leave to love thee is my hire.*' So, fare you heartily well, mistress, and the soldier, your husband. As for me, I am suited here."

So said, he handed Liperata from the dais,

and put the child upon his shoulder. Whistling to the Bilboan, he strode leisurely down the hall over the writhen bodies of the dead and dying, and was seen no more in Milan for that time.

Curiously enough, Sforza entered the city next day at the head of his victorious army, and shortly afterwards married Visconti's daughter. His regrets at not meeting Captain Brazenhead must have been many and bitter. What were Captain Brazenhead's feelings we have no means of knowing; but I understand that he heard of the entry from a lodging he had in Cremona where, under the name of Damoetas, a shepherd, he was then dwelling with the fair Liperata. From these subsequent events, I assume, the curious legend must have arisen that among the many Spanish words whispered in his ear by the Bilboan, while all Milan lay humble at his feet, was the Italian word *Sforza*.

BOOK II

THE COUNTESS OF PICPUS

CHAPTER I

THE STAG AT BORDEAUX

In the month of May, the singing month, and year 1428, Captain Brazenhead, "late of Burgundy, formerly of Milan," or, as he chose to describe himself just then, Captain Salomon, *Franc Routier*, having seen to the bringing up of the pink *Bonne Espérance* to a buoy in the swirling river Gironde, having sworn in three languages at the master and his mariners, who knew but two apiece, and having forced the tears into his eyes more than once by the violent twist he had given his moustachios, said finally, "it is well," and had himself pulled ashore into the King of England's good town of Bordeaux. The hour was early, marking that silver pause of time ere the sun first kindles vane and turret, and scandal can once more be talked by the classically inclined of Aurora and old Tithonus. Save for a few towsled and sprawling malefactors, a stevedore or two, a musing sailor, a sentry, and a friar minor raking over garbage, Captain Salomon headed for a city of dead men; and yet, as he sat facing towers and battlements, stately astern, he were a spectacle for

Bordeaux to wonder at, had not Bordeaux been so deeply abed. Arrayed in a blood-coloured cloak, his sword upon his knee, one keen eye of him, the bony and red ridge of his nose and the ends of his moustachios only to be seen—all the rest steel bonnet and blood—he might have been a duke regnant homing to his faithful duchy, an Admiral of Venice returning with the spoils of Eastern warfare. To some few eyes, anxious and watchful on the quay, he did appear as a portent. And yet it is the fact that there was not a rascal there, purposing to help himself by helping this impending arrival, who had less idea of how he was going to do it than Captain Salomon himself had of what he was going to do when he landed. He surveyed the tide, he marked the shipping. There, fast moored and empty now, lay the galleons which had of late brought men and treasure crowding to the war; and he swore to himself as his boat brought up against the stairs, "If fate must have it that I fight in this good land of France, let it be for France that I draw my sword. England, England!" he cried, "thou who hast forsworn me, be thou of me forsworn!" No matter now what was his grief against our country and his, though the tale be fruitful. He strikes thus, at the outset, a tragic note, which the experienced will mark and record.

Boarding the quay briskly, he set off as one whose errand is cut and dried. This was due, not to an errand, for he had none, but to a maxim

of his which said, Do, if you would think. And another also said, Seem to be busy if you would be so. He rejected all offers of guidance, with a wave of the hand and a snorting "Si je connois Bordeaux—Ha, Dieu!" which were decisive; and he was merciless to the friendly salutes of such ladies as he encountered: "Beauty avoid, Here is a tempered blade." If he knew not where to find what he sought, and it is probable that he did not, seeing that he had never in his life set foot in Bordeaux before, he knew how to place himself within an ace of it. He struck boldly up the Rue de la Ferronière, and, Providence directing, the very first person he jostled cried an acquaintance. "Comrade, all hail! What, little drinker, is it thou?" It was pretty to see how he embraced the man. "Save thee, old companion, 'tis never thou!" Both cheeks were kissed, back and breast were patted, both shoulders were held and their owner swayed to and fro like a loosened post; and all this without the remotest notion in Captain Salomon's head how the devil this old friend might be called. "That botch on the chops I know, and do believe that I gave him the broken jaw it signifies. That drooping eyelid, that nick in it—is it possible I sliced him there? Very possible, by Cock." He knew the man, he knew the man, but could not give him a name. What of that? The man invited him to drink a cup at The Stag; then the man was honest—and, "if I take to him," thought Captain Brazenhead, "as kindly as I take to this his proposal, I'll have the

name out of him before we come to 'Host, another of your best.'" Without more said, he crooked his arm to accommodate the man of the drooping eyelid.

Tongues ruled high and easy in the kitchen of The Stag. The mistress of the house sent the turnspit out to play, lest he would become wise before the time; for the reminiscences of these two eminent men spared neither age nor sex. As for the maids, one of them set foot over the threshold with the morning's bread, and was in the room for just so long as it takes to put a batch in the oven. She entered religion in the afternoon of the same day in the Ursuline Convent, and broke the heart of the scrivener's apprentice who loved her. But she said that it must be so, for that she had never known until that moment what men were or women could be. This is very much of a piece with Captain Brazenhead's report of himself, that when, upon his return from the Lombardy wars, he made his confession in the Church of All Hallows at Barking, the priest who shrove him died in the night, howling like a wolf. And yet the conversation which furnishes me with this anecdote was but so much opening music; it was not until the sun was reddening the roofs of Bordeaux and, reflecting from a window, struck into the filmy eye and drooping eyelid of Captain Salomon's friend, that any serious effort was made by my hero to come to what you might call terms with the man.

But then he hinted—the man hinted—at

proper business, men's business of iron and hard knocks, which had called him to Bordeaux and out of the snuggest quarters that ever soldier had; to traverse France from end to end, to slink by the mountains of Navarre, and enter Guienne under cover of night lest he might be caught by the French and taken out of his lawful quarrel to enter into one with which he had no concern. By "lawful-quarrel" he was easily understood to mean that for which he was paid. Burgundy and England were his friends, he said, and France was the enemy, since France had designs precisely where he had. Burgundy he had approached; he had been to Dijon, thence to Besançon, and there had seen the Duke's Chancellor. Burgundy said him not nay; Burgundy would advise. And now he was at Bordeaux with messages for the Regent of England and the Earl of Salisbury, but the one was in Paris and the other before Orleans—and meantime he had met "his friend here."

It was now apparent to our listener that his mysterious acquaintance was as completely ignorant of his name as he himself was of the speaker's. Being a good judge of physiognomy, he could not doubt that an excellent villainy was afoot; of which, however, he must know more before he committed himself. He was careful in his approach, therefore, not disguising for a moment the truth that he was for hire, but affecting a squeamishness which he was far from feeling as to what manner of service he would take. He

dandled his foot, he looked about, clacked his tongue over the wine.

"A cold vintage this Bordelais, ha? Not a wine that stays by you, ha? No, no, old marksman, give me the rich vats of Volnay! Or Hermitage seven years in cellar. You are right, you are right, chevalier; Burgundy is the friend of honest men. Hey, the golden slopes, the dark-blue water, the cradling women of Beaujolais! Ever lovely to me! Well, if your quarrel is just, it is enough for you. It should be, to have led you so far. But for me, companion, for me—I play the great game. I have played it too long, and, I say it, too stoutly to relish another. Your cattle-lifting, your taking of toll from merchants and pedlars, your petticoat-work, your piracy, your fly-by-night, password, privy-post work—no, no! I set princes on their thrones, I link duchy to duchy; by me kings reign, and queens' dowries are made fatter. Why, gamester, you should know me better! Where is your border warfare, then?"

It is to be judged that Captain Salomon was boasting. So he was, but with design. He wished to provoke the truth out of his friend, and he did provoke some of it. Very earnestly regarding him out of his unhindered eye, that friend put a hand on his knee.

"A duchy is concerned in my errand," he said, "and a county also. The most nobly made lady in Provence is touched upon her honour, and a most reverend prelate offended.

I recruit you, chieftain; chivalry calls you—and this token, which is earnest of more." He drew out of his breast a purse; out of that he chose two rose nobles. With one he chinked for the score, and paid it, the other he handed to his friend, who bit it and was satisfied. Both gentlemen rose; the man of money put his hand upon the shoulder of the man of wiles. "We need you, my lord," he said, "we need your sword-arm; come with us. I depart within a few days, having done my errand. I was bidden levy a troop—and I have levied you! A troop! I have in you an army for the field. Make this your quarters, free lodging and entertainment is yours. You will hear of me when you will at all hours. Till your next meeting—remember Jack Pym."

Pym! If he remembered Jack Pym! The Captain slapped a peck of dust out of his thigh, as he entirely failed to remember him. He raked into the drabbest deeps of his memory, explored a history which had been more happily forgotten, and expended an ingenuity which had been better employed. He did not remember Jack Pym; of that he was clear, and clear he was also that he did not like him. "A very paltry, sententious dog, this Pym," he considered, "with an eyelid like a guttering candle. I fancy the man as little as I fancy a boiled fish, and I doubt his business here. Yet he has money"—he looked at a fine coin in his hand which men give not to men for nothing—"and while he has money it might be well"

—he pocketed the coin—"to see much more of Pym."

He stood considering Pym and his capacities, in the doorway of The Stag, looking out upon the Rue de la Ferronnière; and—see how things fall out for heroes and rogues alike! A girl was before him, trundling a mop, a girl in a green stuff petticoat and bodice of pink. She was comely, with dusty gold hair and grey eyes; and either her shape, which was very pleasant, on the side of plumpness, or a demure yet provocative look which she had, arrested his attention. It arrested the progress of his thoughts, for he stopped them, withdrew them from Pym, stroked his chin, took a turn up the street, stopped and again stroked his chin; returned upon his steps, cleared his throat, flicked upwards his moustachios, looked at the flawless blue of the sky, and all of a sudden burst into melody of the most ear-piercing kind—melody which awoke the echoes of Bordeaux, set all the donkeys braying, and the guards running about to find the disturber of the king's peace.

"O dear my love, my Pericles,"
Thus soft Aspasia she did sigh,
"If so you play in companies,
How would you do when none were by?"
"*Come, chuck,*" quod he, "*come out and try.*"

You should chorus the last line; but none chorused it in Bordeaux. As for the girl who had evoked it, she stood finger in mouth, elbow to mop, wondering upon the fine florid singer.

While she wondered he was gone—but not far. He had crossed the street and entered a narrow alley, the Tournant Bercy, at the end of which a patch of fine colour—the flower market —had caught his eye. Before she had had time to twirl her mop a dozen times he was back, crossing the Rue de la Ferronnière on tip-toe, a propitiating smile upon his face, one hand extended forwards, in that hand a flower; one backward, and in that the folds of his blood-coloured cloak. In another moment he was at close quarters; the flower, a clove carnation, was under her chin, its stalk in her clasp.

"For the fairest," said Captain Brazenhead, and looked at her out of one eye. The other was closed.

"Oh, sir," she said—and the stalk of the flower went into her mouth, and thence the flower itself dangled; while the conversation, if such it can be called, became fluent and intimate.

She told him, in reply to questions, that her name was Nicole la-Grâce-de-Dieu, and that she came from Nogent-le-Rotrou in the Orléanais, or as good as in it—in it, that is, when the French were in fettle, and out again when the English came up. She was one of the maids in the kitchen of The Stag, hired by the year for one hundred sols and a new gown at Lady Day. She was affectionately disposed towards Simon Muschamp, who was one of the singing men in the church of Saint-Michel-le-Grand, and a great musician. He had promised to marry her when

her year was up, and she believed that he would keep his word. She liked flowers as much as other girls did, but of course she had to be careful —and she was his humble servant.

"It is otherwise, far otherwise, beautiful Nicole," said Captain Brazenhead. "Listen now to me." Whereupon he told her as many surprising things about himself as he could remember or invent upon the spur of the moment. As for instance, he said that he was the seventh child of a seventh child, perilously born in the seventh month; that previously to his birth, his mother, a distant relative of the Sophy, had dreamed of basilisks at play in a flowery mead—a thing which had never happened to her before any of his six brothers saw the light; that he had been bred to arms from his youth up and had done feats on horseback and afoot, which he hesitated to relate because of her youth and inexperience. He did, however, give her to understand that ladies had sighed for him, not always in vain; that perfumed gloves, for instance, had been wont to fall at his feet as he walked the streets of nights, particularly in Italy, which he knew well. Ladders, too, of silk, and of remarkable lightness and pliancy, had unfolded themselves from leafy balconies and invited him to romantic adventure more times than he could afford to remember. He had twice been to Avignon and saluted the Pope; once as vassal to lord, once—"but then he had affronted me, I own"—as a man to man. The Court was no more strange to him than camp

or bower. "Sir John Falstaff was my friend. I shared Harry with him, our late king whom God assoil. The king that now is—royal imp of Windsor—how many times he hath jogged upon this knee I care not to say; more times than thou art years old, maiden, belike." He clapped his hand to his heart, and opened his second eye upon the girl. "Battered, indifferent wicked, hardy, deep in craft and counsel, unwearied in adventure—what I have been is all one. What I may be is before you, lady. Fortune calls; I see the white road of honour winding like a ribbon among the stony rocks. I go, I go, Fortune; for so it is decreed of all the Brazenheads. But I should be a recreant to the blood I boast did I either of two things—turn my back upon peril or my eyes away from a beauteous maid. I have touched you, I see!" He had, it is true. Nicole wore a becoming blush and suffered an unquiet breast. "Ha!" he cried, "and a singing mouse seeks you to be his. Oh, bleater of anthems, beware of the soldier!" A little more of such eloquence was enough. With a promise from Nicole that she would wait upon him at supper, "if her mistress would permit her," Captain Brazenhead went blithely on his errands, if errands he had, in this good town of Bordeaux.

CHAPTER II

VI ET ARMIS

SIMON MUSCHAMP, the singing-man of Saint-Michel-le-Grand, proved to be a *rusé* youth of a pale and narrow cast of features, who said little, twiddled his thumbs, and watched that irritating and endless procession of them with moody satisfaction. He was a native of Brabant, out of place at Bordeaux, very much in the Captain's way when he chose to make an inconvenient appearance at the supper-table at which the fair Nicole had been invited to wait, and he had not. He drank the Captain's wine, and, so to put it, did not allow the Captain to do more than hold his to the light. He was thus the cause of considerable constraint; for the lady was very prudent, and though prudence carried up to a point in affairs of gallantry is piquant, carried beyond it, it's the deuce. The Captain—spectacle of a good man struggling with calamity—did his best to bear off the thing with a high hand. He called Nicole his charmer and a rose of Sharon, kissed her hand a dozen times; was affable to Simon, asked for a specimen of his music, inquired into his affairs

and promised to use his interest, hoped that he kept his health, and that his aged mother kept hers, was shocked to find that she was no more, and so on. Nevertheless, he found that Simon had a cold and critical eye frequently upon him and always with disapproval, and a way of turning down the corners of his mouth, when the tale took a higher flight than usual, which tended to shut Nicole's rosy lips—wonderfully open before—to a kind of judicial primness, and, in short, "took the brine" out of our man like a flood of cold water. Brine was a very necessary concomitant in the Brazenhead mixture. "I'm a savoury ham, and that's a fact," he was accustomed to say, "but you might as well eat an egg without salt as souse the devil out before you enjoy me." A narrow rivalry irked him; he was by no means jealous, would have shared such favours as might be allotted and welcome; but he was not to be scared off by a singing-man, and when he reflected that in a day or so's time Pym might claim him for the road, and Simon be left in serene possession, he felt prickles at the back of his neck, which meant that his hair in those parts was standing up, and was a bad sign.

He had found out in the course of an adventurous life that it was a mistake to deny yourself what was to be had for trouble, and was not long in coming at a short way of dealing with Simon. He intended him no bodily hurt at the moment, but was firmly of opinion that, for the sake of his own dignity, if Nicole was not to be his, neither

might she be Simon's. "That upon which Brazenhead casts a favouring eye must be Brazenhead's or God's. If so be that I must take the road along with my friend, warlike Pym, Simon must take it with me and Nicole the veil. I am sorry for the girl, who struck my fancy, but she will not be the first to be scorched in my flame—ah, and shrivelled, the pretty moth! Alack that it should be so! But Cupid is a cruel god, as all poets know, whose way is over splintered rocks. And where is the lover that is not a poet? Not here"—he struck his chest—"no, not here, by Cock."

Meditating these necessities, which, or some of which, are common to our nature, his surprise was high when Simon Muschamp waited upon him on a morning, and in the course of private conversation opened to him similar proposals. Simon was empowered to offer his friend—if he might say so, and the Captain said he might for the moment—a share in an adventure of peril to which he himself was bound; and he did so, he said, in the sure persuasion that Captain Brazenhead was one of those untiring champions of honour who would sooner refuse the sacrament than the chance of death in the open. When he had added that death was one alternative and life on a competence the other, he believed that all was said.

Captain Salomon, who had listened openmouthed to this extraordinary preface, exclaimed here that all was by no means said.

"As thus," he went on, "where are we for, little man?"

"With horse and arms, dear sir," replied Simon, "into Provence."

"And what do we do with our horses and arms in Provence?"

"We assist, under God, a lady of nobility and easy fortune in those parts—the Lady Roesia des Baux, who is ward of the Bishop of Agde."

"We go to Agde! We go to the south! And what is the grief of the Lady Roesia, and what the grief of his lordship the Bishop?"

"That," said Simon, "I am not yet allowed to tell you; but I may add that we go in armed strength into the Duchy of Savoy." Captain Brazenhead was confounded—nay, he was shocked. This singing-man *would* go *armed into Savoy*, levying war! His narrow eyes would peer into the fleshless orbs of Death—into the bitten eyes of dead and ruined men!—into the scarred eyes of dead women! This throstle-pipe would leave "Jesu, dulcis memoria," and try a trumpet-stave of "Ha, Saint Denis!" or "Ha, Montjoie!"

He was stern with the singing-man. "Look you, Simon, I doubt your tale, and your mountains of Savoy. Pale weed, I have seen the Alps; white death there, Simon, and ice in the marrow of stouter men than thou! No, no. To the quire with thee, boy. Prick songs, or souls, Simon, and leave the pricking of spears to thy betters!" His moustachios aspired towards heaven, his eyebrows bent to meet them on the

way. "And so much for thee, Simon," said Captain Brazenhead, thinking so, indeed; but the singing-man gently persisted.

"My tale is none the less true, sir. Soon we must depart."

The Captain threw up his head.

"And where do we go so soon?"

"We go to Agde, sir, to the castle of the Lord Bishop."

"Your authority?" He snapped his words.

"My authority, sir, is a gentleman-at-arms."

"Let me see this gentleman."

"You shall, sir," said Simon, and went out, and returned with Pym—Pym of the drooping eyelid. Captain Brazenhead was again confounded, and for the time capitulated. There was nothing more to be said. He was Pym's, and Simon was Pym's, and Nicole might take the veil as soon as she must. Thus the high gods, wielding the world, wielded him and his along with it; but what had confounded a not easily confounded soldier was that Simon Muschamp had settled with Pym on his own account that very thing which was to have been settled for him. This sort of strategy was outside experience, and should have given a hint of the quire-man's quality.

Now, so free was Pym of his rose-nobles, so efficient were his preparations, that in a few days' time a respectable troop had been collected, mounted, armed, licked into discipline of a kind, and was declared by Captain Brazenhead to be

ready for the field. By "discipline" he meant that they would none of them run away so long as you were looking at them—no more. And "respectable" is or may be an adjective of number, and is so used here. In no other sense could it be applied to the force about to march to the assistance of the Bishop of Agde. "You have here, my Pym," the Captain had said frankly, "a score of the sorriest scoundrels in this broken realm of France. You have a coin-clipper, two Jews, three Andalusian half-castes, an unfrocked priest, and two men condemned to the hulks for robbing children on their way to church. If that pock-marked fellow on the bay is not a deserter from the English, then I don't know a horse from a mule; and as for your Gascons, let widows weep. They will talk themselves off this earth in four-and-twenty hours. Then your Simon. What do you make of Simon and his narrow face? Modesty! Too circumspect for me, and too careful of the way we are going. I have a thought that he knows it backwards and intends to test his knowledge. Several things incline me to think that Simon and I are to try a fall of wits together."

This was upon the road, some few leagues from Bordeaux, whence they had departed at the dawn of a fine summer's day, watched by the fair Nicole la-Grâce-de-Dieu. She, the cause of much that was to come, had stood upon the wall as they defiled through the landward gate. In her mouth the clove carnation of her wooing

was twisting upon its stalk. And "Farewell, thou bright disaster!" Captain Brazenhead had cried her; for he judged that much her due and his duty, and had waved his hand. She had kissed hers for answer, but whether to the Captain or to Simon Muschamp nobody can say. It is certain that Simon scowled.

It would seem that the pretty figure she made up there—"like a wilding flower"—on the wall, with the sun on her face and hair, persisted and gave thoughts; for the Captain led the conversation to women and fond lovers more than once, and while he did not himself refer to Nicole, he was careful that others should. All he ever said about her was in answer to some eulogy of Pym's. "She had a taking shape—that's all I know," was his commentary, and a fit of profound meditation the result of that. But it was from the moment when she kissed her hand, and Simon scowled, that the Captain began to keep the young man in his eye, and he soon saw that the youth's proceedings were not such as a man makes who has a week's journey in front of him. Nor were they those of a man who is out for a known stage of leagues, and sure of a night's rest for himself and his beast. Simon spared his horse, travelled light, and was careful of landmarks. He paused at the tops of hills, inquired into the names of villages, and refused entirely to accompany Captain Brazenhead in the pursuit of certain mallards with a goshawk. All these circumspect arrangements of the narrow-faced clerk did his rival mark and ponder.

But other serious matters claimed a part of his attention. Mr. Pym, free of Bordeaux, opened the whole of his commission, which, however little it is part of mine, I must summarise for the reader's convenience.

If the Lady Roesia des Baux were a person of consequence, as, being heiress of a seigniory and last of a long, wicked, and very noble line, she could hardly fail to be, she was, said Pym, rendered doubly consequential by the fact of her betrothal to a certain prince, no other than the Count Philibert of Savoy, and trebly so, in his eyes, by her tutelage under the famous Bishop Martin of Agde, in whose service Pym was proud to acknowledge himself and proud to have enlisted his momentous friend. Such a lady, then, was the Lady Roesia, who, waiting at her ripe age of sixteen years and a half until it should please Count Philibert to marry her, was stolen out of her rocky demesne by the Red Count of Picpus and taken a prisoner, God knows whither, to the scandal of all Christendom, the contempt of Holy Church, and the vexation of everybody in the world except Count Philibert. Now he, said Pym, being a man of forty years old, and passably vicious——

An interruption from Captain Brazenhead shows his knowledge of the world, of men, and of manners. "No, no, Pym," he said, with lifted hand, "you are wrong. I know the Prince; I met him in Milan before this century was begun. His vices are perfectly agreeable to his degree.

He is of a reigning house, brother to sovereign—ah, to a monarch! What in you might be deplorable, my poor Pym, or in me noteworthy, in Count Philibert, I assure you, is hardly remarkable." Pym was annoyed, and sawed the air to show that he was. "The thing is of no moment," continued his friend, "but yet——"

"Of a moment or not," cried Pym, "it is woundily inconvenient to condone a man's vices when I am about to tell you of his lady's perfections."

"That is so," said Captain Brazenhead. "Advance, my Pym."

The deed of dread was done, the young lady neatly, expeditiously, and immitigably ravished, said Pym; and the Red Count of Picpus was suspected of it. If Madame Roesia was not in his stronghold of Picpus in Savoy, then many persons were liars, and some were fools. A priest, an old priest of Beaucaire, who served the Red Count for chaplain, had her tale in confession, had broken the faith he owed his master, and given himself the trouble to come down to Agde to warn the Bishop thereof. Now we were at the point. The Bishop, a warlike prelate, was about to levy war upon Picpus. Pym, then serving him in an honourable capacity, was sent first to Burgundy, then to the English. From Burgundy he had had promises, from the English curses; but from the English, nevertheless (he rubbed his hands), he had got a jewel of price when he got

Captain Salomon Brazenhead, sometimes called the Great.

Captain Brazenhead, as he listened carefully to this tale, was not so sure that Pym had got him, as Pym seemed to be. There was much to be weighed in the adventure; and what interested him mostly in it, that to which he found his mind recurring again and again, was—What was the present state of Les Baux itself, that fair seigniory, one of the noblest in Provence? Sat Picpus there in possession? He could hardly suppose so. Had he yet, as no doubt he intended, married Roesia? If he had not—if he had not—the red blood rose singing up from Captain Brazenhead's heart, and made his head spin round. So soon as he was recovered from his vertigo he interrogated Pym.

"This is a fine tale you tell me here," he said. "I should be hard shifted to better it. And so we are for Les Baux?"

"No, no," says Pym, "we go to Agde."

"Peste! But we take the road of Marseille, I suppose?"

"We do not," says Pym; "we take the road of Perpignan. Thence we ship. If you, an Englishman, are in a hurry for heaven, you will enter the French King's country as soon as you can. In that case your road lies yonder. I am in no such hurry. I go to Orthez, thence to Pau in Béarn, and thence by the mountains, which are any man's land, into the country of the Count of Foix. Thence I ship for Agde."

"Doubtless you are right," said Captain Brazenhead; "but now tell me this. From Agde we go, I suppose, to Picpus? Or are we perhaps too late? Is it possible that Picpus has possessed himself of the Lady Roesia—I mean by marriage? Or, again——"

"You ask too many questions," said Pym, testily. "From Agde we by no means go to Picpus, but to Coneo in Savoy, to the Count Philibert. Do you think that lords, bishops, and princes in alliance levy war like little pirates, so that the first declaration of hostilities you have is the slitting of your windpipe? If the Lord Bishop of Agde has been ten years learning of the tale, may he not be as many months righting of the wrong, in a nobleman's manner? Friend, you know better."

"Maybe that I do," said Brazenhead calmly; "yet there is much to be said for the more ancient plan."

"When the Count and the Bishop have joined forces, a summons of outlawry will be sent to Picpus with heralds and a papal nuncio. Protocols will be exchanged, ambassadors accredited; there will be a conference——!"

"In the meantime the Count of Picpus will have a Countess of Picpus, and the seigniory of Les Baux, and, I should say, a young Count of Picpus in arms ready to be weaned."

"You judge by the staple of ordinary Christians," said Pym, "but not so are princes to be measured. The Count of Picpus has gone to

Rome to sue for a divorce from the Lady Blandemire, his wife. It is very seldom that a gentleman of his degree can be wedded at a moment's notice. He has had three wives already."

"The proper man! Has he so, indeed?" says Brazenhead; and asked no more questions. Indeed, he fell into a fit of musing which lasted him until the halt for dinner was sounded upon the horn.

But for all this and that, he never failed to keep one eye upon the dubious proceedings of Simon Muschamp, the pale singing-man, whose narrow face seemed too anxious for the steel sallet which adorned it.

CHAPTER III

HUE AND CRY AFTER SIMON

THAT desolate country of salt marsh, swamp, and cranes, which begins soon after you leave Bordeaux, delighted Captain Brazenhead when he had shaken off the effects of the tale he had heard. It afforded him abundant opportunities for the flying of his goshawk, in which he was aided by such of his companions as he found to his taste. Simon Muschamp would never have been one of these, but, had he been, he would have declined the sport. That circumspect young man was ever at the tail of the company, walking his horse and spying at the set of the country, until within a league or two of the monastery of Belin-les-Fossés, when its tall belfry could be seen reddening to the western sun. Then, indeed, he pricked forward to the van and was observed to be in close and intimate conversation with Pym—"Old Tallow-Eye," as Captain Brazenhead called him in allusion to his infirmity.

The upshot of this dangerous commerce with the narrow-faced man was as painful to Pym as

it was expected by his friend. The monks had been hospitable, the supper abundant, the wine beyond reproach. Captain Brazenhead, having seen to the bedding of his horse, was about to consider his own; in fact, he was as good as asleep, when he was aroused by a most dreadful howling, as of a hound with uplifted head pouring forth his complaint to the full moon. Even this would not have hurt the Captain; "Damn the dog" would have settled him off again, but there was more. His blanket was plucked off him, his shoulder was gripped as by claws of steel. "Lady of Graces!" he cried, and sat up. There, by the light of the swinging lantern he saw Pym before him,—Pym, with his grey lock flying wild,—Pym, with his unhampered eye astare, and his other under its sheath glimmering whitely.

"Help me! They rob! Pillage! To the thief! To the thief!"

These were Pym's words, roared blankly into the vague, and his actions suited them. He seemed not to know what he was doing with his arms. Captain Brazenhead rose up and girt on his sword.

"Simon Muschamp?" he asked, and needed no answer. "Then I have him," said he, and went down the ladder.

As he was saddling, Pym told him all. Simon had been absent from supper, but so good had been the cheer that no one had observed it.

"You are wrong, man. I noticed it," said

Brazenhead, and then asked, "He has your treasure?"

"He has it all."

"Why did you entrust him with it, my friend?" Pym hung his head.

"I will tell you the whole of my infatuation, Captain," said he, full of shame. "That close rogue led me to believe that you had designs upon it."

"Damn him, and he was right," said the Captain to himself.

"And that it would be safe only with him, since you knew him for a declared enemy, and would never touch him."

"And there," said the Captain, "Simon was wrong. Touch him! I'll eat him."

The convent bell sounded. "Matins," said Brazenhead, "an hour past midnight," he opened the stable-door, "and three hours' moon to come. Pym!" he said, "your hand. Expect me at Perpignan. I know my road." Pym was in tears.

"God will reward you, noble Salomon."

"That is my confident expectation," said the Captain. "All turns out for the best. Farewell." He rode out of the monastery gates and took the road to Bordeaux. His horse, pricking up his ears, was well content that it should be so. He went through the sand at a light and easy canter which was a delight to his rider. Captain Brazenhead began to sing.

No need to trace his steps, nor listen to his

music. He entered Bordeaux one of the first, and joyfully hailed the warder of the gate as an old acquaintance. Hardly a soul was in the streets, hardly a chimney smoked; the watchmen sat in their boxes sunk asleep, and the lanterns, still alight, swung garishly upon their chains. He went at walking-pace down the Rue de la Ferronnière; no signs of life there. He turned into the stable yard, dismounted there, and going to pick the lock of the stable with the point of his sword, found that job already done for him.

"O-ho! run aground, Simon!" said he; and it was so. In the stable, all in a muck of lather and sweat, stood a roan horse. "Now by Cock and his father," said the Captain, "there's a sorry knave to be trusted with a horse. O Simon, Simon, if thou art not soon even as this good beast, may it go hard with me at the Last Day."

He was careful to rub down his own animal; he even went the length of covering Simon's with a blanket before he thought of his coming happiness. These things done, he went into the house, his boots in his hand.

All outer windows were shuttered, but within a light directed him towards the kitchen. That light shone, as he knew very well, through a window which opened upon a passage. It was used as a buttery hatch in the daytime. Standing in the passage in the dark suited the Captain very well; for he could see and not be seen. He put down his boots, crept up to the window, peered

cautiously round the corner, being careful that the candle should throw no shadow of him on he wall, and saw what he saw.

Simon sat at ease by the table, the remains of a meal before him: leg-bones of chickens, a knuckle of ham, chewed artichoke, crumbs of cheese, an onion and a crust of bread. A jug stood there, a glass half full. By his side was a leather bag, tied with a lace. His sword was off, his doublet unfastened, his feet were on a stool, he leaned against the wall and picked his teeth. His countenance expressed complacency and indifference to suffering; a smile hovered over his lips, his eyebrows lifted up and down. When he was not engaged with his toothpick he whistled, and when he did not whistle he fell again to his excavations. Before him in a drooping attitude stood, or rather hung, Nicole the fair—Nicole la-Grâce-de-Dieu—her face between her hands, and by the sudden motions of her shoulders it was to be seen that she was crying. All else about her betrayed a hasty summons from her bed; her slippers were on bare feet, or partly on, her hair was stuck up with one hairpin, her petticoat was awry, her bodice ashift. But the Captain had no eyes for such things: the sight of a girl in tears sent the blood to his head. Before he knew what he was about, he had swung open the window with a blow of his fist, vaulted through the opening and clasped Nicole in his arms. The maid shrieked, and Simon backed awfully to the wall.

"Ha, dog and dog's son!" said Captain Brazenhead, "if that wall could speak it would cry out against thee. But there is no need for testimony when Brazenhead is at hand. Fellow, prepare for thy last hour on earth."

He kissed Nicole's wet cheek, and set her down. Sword in hand, he advanced to the miserable Simon.

"Sir, sir," said that wretch, "let us reason together." And the Captain paused. He could reason as well as any man: but was this a time?

His sword was shaking in his hand as if he were meditating where he might best strike; but, as a truth, he was meditating no such matter. He was reflecting that Simon might be useful to him, and could not in any case be left in Bordeaux alive. The question then was, was it wise to maim a man whom you must take with you on an expedition of length and delicacy? Would it encourage Simon to be loyal and discreet? On the other hand, Simon had behaved to Nicole as no man could be allowed to behave unscathed. Simon must, therefore, be chastised, but not, he thought, wounded with the sword. He returned the weapon to its sheath, and asked Nicole to get him some stout cords. When she was gone he addressed his expectant victim as follows:—

"Thou seest, singing-mouse, how dangerous it is to meddle in matters too high for thee. Happier hadst thou been quavering *Pange lingua* in thy tuneful minor than riding afield with Free

Routiers and Companions of the Road. Yet since—to be very plain with thee, Simon—thou didst bring back my body to the place where I had left my heart, and spare me, moreover, the irksomeness of that burden of which it had been all along my intention to relieve Old Tallow-Eye, I am content to pardon what thou didst design as a buffet at me. Not for those things am I about to chasten thee, Simon, but for that thou didst without the fear of God before thine eyes deal ungentlemanly with the fair Nicole, disturbing her slumbers, causing her to array her beauteous person negligently and slatternly, causing her to serve thy trifling meals, and to stand—she a courted maid of degree—while thou, singing-man, didst sit dallying with thy pronged fork at thy false teeth; ah, *proh pudor*, and causing her to weep upon my account with thy dastard's news of my death at thy ridiculous hands—the which last is a very abominable fact, and will enrol thy name in the company of Elymas the sorcerer, and of Judas Iscariot, that most false treasurer, unless I sift thee as wheat, Simon, unless I throughly purge thy floor, unless I scorch and frizzle and fry the vice out of thee."

Nicole, entering here with his needs, he thanked her and sent her away, lest, as he said, more shame were laid upon the man's shoulders than the man's shoulders could bear. She went, and Captain Brazenhead very heartily belaboured Simon for near a quarter of an hour, tanning his

hide and dusting his jacket at one and the same time. That done, he trussed him like a turkey—his hands behind his back, his knees and ankles together; he gagged him with a napkin and bound him up in a table-cloth; he hoisted him on his shoulder and carried him up into the loft, where he laid him away upon a shelf as if he had been so much kitchen stuff put by until winter—a side of pork or a half sheep salted.

"Move, Simon, my son," he said, "and thou fallest, and thy neck must break. Move not, and thou mayest sleep at ease. At nightfall I will come for thee, and thou shalt take the road again—this time in a gentleman's service." Returning to the house, he put the bag of rose nobles inside his doublet and buttoned it up. It bulged at his side like a serious wen, and was not comfortable, but, as he said, there were ways of easing that which would be used soon enough. It was a far cry, he knew, from Bordeaux to Les Baux, and that was where his fancy led him.

Meantime, he sought the chambers of the house, and, finding one empty, lay upon the bed, and slept like any patriarch of Ephesus.

CHAPTER IV

CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD REVEALS HIMSELF

Enormously refreshed by his slumbers, Captain Brazenhead awoke feeling the need of a draught, and roared until he got it. He arose as a giant renewed with wine, dipped his head in cold water and combed his hair back with his fingers, gave a flick to his moustachios, put on his boots, sword-belt and sword, and was ready for what he had to do.

His cloak upon his arm, his steel bonnet on his head, he descended the stair and inquired for Madame Cornichon. She was landlady of The Stag, stout and well-favoured; she received him with smiles, for his account had been liberally discharged by the lavish Pym.

"Madame," said he—and his French was extremely polished—"I must beg the favour of a short but intimate conversation with you."

"As short, sir, as you please," said Madame Cornichon, "and as intimate as I please. On those terms your favour is granted. Be seated, sir." Captain Brazenhead had set a chair for the

lady, handed her to it, seated himself and laid his hand lightly upon his heart.

After an effective pause, "Madame," he said, "I am not what I appear."

"Nobody is," said Madame Cornichon, who had had a great deal of experience.

"And nobody less so than I," said the Captain, undismayed. "For reasons of family, for reasons of politics, I appear to you as a warring Englishman. You expected me to join a company to start for Orleans—and I surprised you by not going. Be not deceived, madame. I am not an Englishman, though the English are my friends. My master, however, is the Duke of Burgundy, and my mission is done. I am about to depart for my lands."

"For your lands, sir!" cried the lady. "God bless me, have you lands?"

"Madame, a many, fair and wide—in the East, madame. Reasons, as I say, of family and statecraft urge me to conceal my degree; but reasons of heart, madame, not to be denied, insist upon full and open confession. Madame, I am the Count of Picpus."

Nobody could have been more interested than Madame Cornichon in this dramatic avowal. Nobody could have been more touched by its frankness and evident sincerity. The revelation was sudden; but there's no doubt that the name of Picpus had struck the Captain's fancy.

"You have in your service, madame," he pursued, "a young person of taking appearance

and considerable charm of manner. I admit that she has pleased me. I consider that she would look well in the chambers of my Castle of Picpus. It is not often that I am deceived in anybody ; I am somewhat notorious for my rapidity of judgment. I say that this young person has attracted my attention, and I ask you whether the matter cannot be arranged between us according to the bent of my humour. I have here, madame,"—and he relieved his doubtlet of its gigantic burden—" I have here wherewith to offer you any equivalent in reason for the inconvenience my wayward fancies may put you to." He untied the sack : " Madame, how much shall we say for the cancelling of the hiring agreement of Nicole la Grâce-de-Dieu ? " He had a handful of rose-nobles weighing in his hand ; and Madame Cornichon, whatever suspicion she may have had before, had nothing now but enthusiasm for her distinguished guest.

" Monsieur le Comte," said she, " as I am a very honest woman, although I keep an inn, I shall take the liberty of informing you that one of those pieces would pay the wages of Nicole for five years, and that half of one would more than pay her value for life in my eyes."

Captain Brazenhead replied somewhat stiffly, " Your humour, madame, does not jump with mine. I set no bounds to the value of the damsel. I could not, upon my honour, assess the value of the young person at less than this sack of nobles, but I must not gainsay you. You are mistress

here, and your word is law. Allow me to offer you—" whereupon he gently pressed a couple of his fine coins into her hand. "At nightfall I set out for my lands," he said, "and will take the young person with me. If it would not be troubling you excessively, I would be obliged if you would inform her of her changed fortunes. Madame, I salûte you—the Count of Picpus, who fears nothing but dishonour, salutes you." Captain Brazenhead kissed the hand of Madame Cornichon and bowed himself out. In so doing he left behind him the most astounded landlady in the distracted realm of France.

Leaving Captain Brazenhead for the moment to look after himself, as I think I may, there is no doubt that his proposals, as translated by Madame Cornichon, with regard to Nicole made a great stir in the kitchen of The Stag. When Madame Cornichon, aproned and bare-armed to the elbows, came in to prepare the eleven o'clock ordinary, and found her bevy of maids, cooks, and scullions eating their dinner, her first act was to go to Nicole and take her by the chin.

"Madame de Picpus," said she, "I congratulate you with all my heart." Then she kissed the girl, to the astonishment of the table, and added, "Monsieur le Comte has been generous—lavish indeed. You are a fortunate girl and a joy to your parents—and I lose a treasure! But I have never stood in a girl's way yet, and never will."

The maids nudged each other, the varlets

bolted their food or choked within their cups of horn; but Nicole crimsoned to the roots of her hair. Madame Cornichon, happy in the bolt she had let fall in her little domestic pool, watching, as it were, the ever-widening rings it made, smiled benevolently upon the glowing maid and patted her cheek. "Yes, my children," she said, "we have indeed entertained an angel unadvised; but in such a city as Bordeaux, and in such an inn as The Stag, all kinds of company may be expected—quality as well as *canaille.* I do but state the fact, however. This child whom I hired six months come Pentecost in the fair of Beaugency for a hundred *sols* a year, and a new stuff gown at Lady Day, leaves us this night as Countess of Picpus, and rides to her lands with the Count her husband. My lamb," and she caressed Nicole, "this board is not for the likes of you any more. Go and clean yourself and come into the counting-house. No doubt his Excellency the Count will inform you of his intentions." Nicole, without a word to say, rose from the table and retired. Madame Cornichon sent for a flagon of Léoville and gave the toast of the Count and Countess of Picpus. It was received with acclamation. All the maids of The Stag received firm proposals in the course of the afternoon.

But it was Captain Brazenhead's turn to be astonished when, upon returning from his affairs, he learned from Madame Cornichon of the interpretation she had put upon his declaration. For

one moment his resource failed him—for that pulsing moment when Madame Cornichon said shyly, "Curb your impatience, monseigneur. The bride arrays herself."

He bayed upon her—his fine form bent itself at the hips, as a boy's for leap-frog; but his head, stiffening, refused to bend. His eyes, terribly fixed upon the lady, were like speckled opals, to each a black point; his mouth was open, his tongue flapped heavily like the tail of a fish out of water. "*Plait-il?*" he made a great effort.

"*Madame de Picpus va venir*," said Madame Cornichon; and the Captain said, "Ha!" and swallowed hard. Then, raising himself to his natural height, he folded his arms and uttered the sublime words, "It is well; you have done well, madame."

This heroism braced him; he was able to converse on indifferent topics with Madame Cornichon; he was able to compose his mind. When, in due course, the fair Nicole came timidly into the room, arrayed in her gown of contract, the new stuff gown which she had received at Lady Day, and a variety of silver ornaments in her hair, he was able to salute her as a duchess, to kiss the tips of her fingers, hand her to a chair, and turn his mind to the arrangements proper to be made for a future Countess of Picpus. These necessitated another visit to the town, another formal leave-taking, which was duly performed.

If it would be hard to account for Captain Brazenhead's prevarication—to use no harsher

term—during his first interview with Madame Cornichon so momentous to himself, it would be still harder to explain his behaviour in the light of the second. Perhaps, a desire to excel, very creditable to any man, may have been his monitor; perhaps a prevision of the course of events, perhaps a feeling that not otherwise than by rigorous lying could he carry off at one and the same time his personal dignity, and a kitchen-maid from The Stag who had caught his fancy and inflamed his passions. To do the Captain justice, I propose a compromise. A man is, in a sense, what he desires to be; if Captain Brazenhead therefore aspired to a County in Savoy, in imagination, in all that ennobles a man and sets him above the brutes, he was indeed a count. The title, Count of Picpus, so trippingly did it come, had captivated him from the first moment he heard it; no dream of his hot midnight youth could have flattered him with a fairer future than such a degree. Count of Picpus! Oh, it should go hard with him if such were not his style within the year. And he had a plan. He saw his way. He did but advance by a few mad months the astounding, the overwhelming, the reeling fact. And then came the thought of Nicole, that charming girl, so bashful and yet so circumspect. Here I think we may put a finger upon the point where magnanimity became a source of weakness, and imagination, like an over-fertilized plant, wasted in profusion of leafage what might have produced fruit-bearing flowers. His intentions

towards Nicole were up to this point vague if generous. His Castle of Picpus: she would look well there. He saw her already there, trundling a mop, a carnation between her teeth—charming, charming Nicole! Better this by far than the life of religion to which he had so nearly resigned her. So far and no further had his fancy carried her when he opened his mind to Madame Cornichon.

But Madame Cornichon was made of different fibre, or you may be sure she had never thriven at The Stag. Imagination with her was strictly limited to the scope of the cash-box. She had as little zest for long scores as for long-bows. To her mind this bristling, ardent Count of Picpus, with his sackfuls of minted money and tales of dukes and lordships, was a romantic figure just so far as his sacks and his duchies would take him; otherwise he was plainly a fool. In nothing was he so plainly a fool as in his proposals towards Nicole and his extravagant payment for the forfeiture of her hiring. What the exact nature of these proposals might be she did not inquire or care, but it suited her humour to give them an ironic magnificence. It gratified her to go into her own kitchen and pluck out a little nobody by the hand and announce her to her gaping mates as a Countess of Picpus. It gratified her also to impart to her astounding guest the droll turn she had given to his arrangements. This sort of thing tickled Madame Cornichon. She indulged her contempt for the lower orders, and was able

to put a man who gave himself airs into a ridiculous position—his proper place, in fact.

But she had reckoned without her Captain, or rather she had reckoned with only half of him. And if she made that half of him ridiculous which she understood, that other half of him which she could never understand made her in turn ridiculous. For that other half of him took her seriously—and was in five minutes as complacent as could be over the new aspect of affairs.

Countess of Picpus! Thus in a flash the Captain's heart tutored his head. Oh, shy, recondite and humble beauty! Oh, peering hedge-flower! What a Countess of Picpus he had won! There is no man of heart and head who does not picture with a beating pulse the day when he may lift such an one out of the dust, and say, "Behold, my dove, my fair one, what a crown for thy quiet brow is provided by the largess of my love!" I say that this was a noble aspiration of Captain Brazenhead's, which only lacked performance to make all earnest lovers ashamed to put their professions beside it; and I say also that it is hard to reproach a soldier with his lack of a title of honour before the very existence of that dignity has been for twenty-four hours within his knowledge. Certainly Captain Brazenhead would have laid the Picpus circlet at the feet of Nicole had he had it. As he had it not, the next best thing which he could do he did—I mean, when he hailed her by the name which he now entirely intended her to bear.

A tailor with three apprentices, from the Rue Saint-Remy, was occupied with the person of the new Madame de Picpus from noon until five; a riding-dress of crimson velvet of Genoa figured with pomegranates and coronets was the result—and a charming result. A peaked head-dress, with a silk veil about the turned-back brim, for the dust and heat of travel, added dignity to charm; scarlet riding-boots of soft leather, gauntlets of chamois skin.—But so much for the outward necessaries of a lady of condition; and of the others, invisible but very proper, be sure that the rose-nobles of the Bishop of Agde did not spare them. At a quarter before six, Captain Brazenhead entered the counting-house of Madame Cornichon, and, jewelled cap in hand, bowed before his bride. In a stately manner, forgetful neither of the emotions of a lover nor of the dignity of rank, he knelt to kiss her hand. Madame Cornichon was by this time in tears. She was herself a personable woman, a widow of but a few months' standing; it is possible, therefore, that her tears were not of pure happiness; it is possible that envy was the drop of venom which gave them a sting. Here was a splendid man on his knees to a slip of a girl—and for God knew what reason, since there was nothing in her. However that may be, she was a good soul, and vowed their Excellencies should have cause to remember their last hour at The Stag of Bordeaux. Excusing herself, she hastened to the kitchen, and soon, while Captain Brazenhead was kissing

Madame de Picpus, a fine capon was turning on the spit, and two scullions basting it with lard.

The Captain did not conceal his extreme satisfaction with the turn of events. With Madame de Picpus on his knee he explained to her how fortunate was the hour in which he had first seen her trundling her mop. "But for thee, my heart's heart, I had been trailing through the swamps of Guienne in the hire of a Bishop of Agde; but for thee, I had been at the mercy of a man with but one serviceable eye; but for thee there had been no County of Picpus, no treasury, without which titles of honour are but an itch. In fine, my sovereign, from thy lap have I picked up all my worldly store, and it shall go hard with me, but I return it sevenfold in thy bosom."

Nicole thanked him becomingly. "Sir," said she, "I will engage to be an obedient wife to your lordship. I am but a poor girl——"

"Zounds!" cried the Captain, "not at all. You are a very lovely person, and need but a thing or two, which you shall presently have, to be the countess, in fact, which you are already in expectation."

"And what things do I need, sir?" asked Nicole.

The Captain stretched out his hand and took a flower from a glass. "To my eye," he said, "you need a flower in your mouth. Not that your lips are not already a flower, but that the obstacle may provoke me."

Laughingly she took the stalk between her teeth. "We cannot live on kisses, sir," she said,

"We can try, however," said the Captain, and tried.

I think that Captain Brazenhead, suffering from a defect which is common to all great men, had underrated his charming companion. Because she was pretty, he thought she was a toy; because she was scared, he thought she was unformed; because she was kind, he thought that he should have the forming of her. The reality was to be made plain to him.

"What are you going to do with me now, sir?" asked Nicole, when the Captain had demonstrated his point about kisses. It will now be seen that she was a girl of some force of character, for when he had replied gaily that he was about to make her his countess, she asked him if he was a count? Now, nobody had ever asked him that before, and for a moment it sobered him.

"By the Face, and I am not, my dear, and that's a fact," said he. Nicole pondered this avowal with hanging head. She did not move from her seat upon his knee, but she plucked the carnation to pieces while she thought.

"Then how am I a countess?" was the upshot of her meditation. The Captain stroked his moustachios.

"In this way, as I take it, my dear. I am a man of decision and speed, as you have found out —hey?"

"Yes, sir," said Nicole, "so much I have found out."

"Counts are as plenty," he continued, "as herrings in the blue water—and where I go there are counties to be had."

"And where do you go, sir?"

"I go to my—to Picpus."

"Oh, sir, that is far!"

"It is in Dauphiné, I believe," said the Captain, "or thereabouts. I know the road."

"And in Picpus—you will be Count of Picpus?"

"Not at all, my dear," said Captain Brazenhead. "In Picpus I shall secure the Lady Roesia des Baux, whom one Picpus stole as a guileless infant, and shall restore her to her inheritance. By that means I earn her undying gratitude, and the pardon of her kinsman, the Bishop of Agde, for a temporary inconvenience I may have caused him. In the very act of so doing I possess myself of the Seigniory of Picpus; for the robber and assassin who now holds it, you must understand, is gone to Rome to seek a divorce from his wife, the Lady Blandemire. Therefore——"

"Therefore," said Nicole, "one of two things must occur. Either you marry the Lady Roesia instead of her present possessor, in which case I am not Countess of Picpus, or you slay the Count of Picpus on his return to his castle—in which case you are hanged."

"Pest!" said the Captain, "all this is very possible."

"I have a proposal to make," said Nicole, "which is that you do not go to Picpus at all,

but leave the Lady Roesia where she is, and the Count of Picpus in Rome."

"And where do you propose to go, my love?" said he.

"I propose to go to Les-Baux, which is nearer, and has more amenity. I don't love mountain countries. I am not used to them, and they give me the spleen."

"Les-Baux," said the Captain, "is good, and a fair inheritance. But it is in ruin, and all the inhabitants put to the sword by the false Picpus."

"So much the better," replied Nicole. "You and I will repeople it," and she blushed faintly.

"I see my way so far," said the Captain; "I certainly see my way. But the Count—the false Picpus, as I have well called him——"

"You tell me that he is unknown in Provence."

"Save in name, and by a reputation which is both redoubted and deplorable, I believe he is."

"Then you have answered your own objection," said Nicole. "He remains the false Picpus, and you the true Picpus. Am I clear?"

"Clear as the sky of Provence, clear as the Rhone flood. But the Lady Roesia——?"

"I am your Lady Roesia," said Nicole, and kissed Captain Brazenhead. You need not ask with what rapture she was pressed to his bosom, nor whether her kisses were returned. He swore by the Nine Worthies of Christendom that no Count of Picpus, his ancestor, had ever won a more dainty bride. He blessed Balthasar, King

of Armenia and Cologne, that from his loins had sprung so notable a Des-Baux—last, loveliest, and most subtle of her race. He reminded her of the war-cry of her family, in case she should have forgotten it. "*Au hasard, Balthasar!*" he cried, and waved his sword over their heads—and he swore by Saints Dominus, Tecum, and Nobis Peccatoribus that not one hour should elapse before he was heading for the violated domain of his injured, innocent, and ravished lady.

Considerably more than an hour did elapse, however, for there was a supper with Madame Cornichon, which was gay, and a ceremony to follow it, which was protracted. Indeed, the sun was dimpling Garonne with points and cressets of light when the horses were brought out and Madame de Picpus lifted gallantly to the saddle by her spouse. Even then a chance word from Madame Cornichon in the midst of her farewell reminded Captain Brazenhead that a duty remained undone.

"Au bonheur, monsieur et dame," cried the good woman for the fifteenth time; "but it vexes me that you should leave without a lackey." Then Captain Brazenhead struck his thigh.

"I have one, by Cock, and had forgotten him. Go one of you and fetch me my rascal." And he named the shelf where Simon Muschamp would be found.

And so he was, and there is no need to ask whether he swore to be a loyal servitor to M. and Madame de Picpus. If thirteen hours' vigil,

trussed on a shelf, do not inspire a man with a devoted attachment to his master—to say nothing of a drubbing, robbery of a sack of rose-nobles, robbery of a mistress—then, where, we may ask with Captain Brazenhead, where in this world may an honest servant be found? Simon Muschamp's own ideas on this and other subjects will be learned very slowly. I will only warn the reader that he, too, had a soul of his own, which is probably the case with every man born of woman, though the romancers, historians, and politicians of the world, for reasons best known to themselves, are apt to overlook it.

CHAPTER V

THE CITY ACCURSED

In after years Captain Brazenhead could never hear the name of Raymond, be told that the day was the sixteenth of May, or be reminded of the city of Toulouse, without an affection of the muscles of the face painful to witness. A series of twitchings, like those incessant flickering sheets of light which the Italians call Saint Elmo's fire, played upon him without mercy. He looked like a palsied man. His lips shot open and showed his teeth chattering together; his eyelids glimmered over eyes all white; his ears seemed endowed with a life of their own, and his moustachios bristled of themselves. The reason of this malady, fortunately transient, has now to be related. In the city of Toulouse, on May 16, 1428, under the governance of Sieur Raymond de Breteuil, chief consul of the place, Captain Brazenhead suffered defeat, deprivation of goods, wounding of his members, and rigorous confinement to gaol. Let these things be related in order.

If we are to consider as defects in his character

that he too readily believed persons to be what he wished them to be, and too readily supposed circumstances to be remediable by exertion, our judgment upon him will be lenient, for these are noble defects. His was that generous nature which gives as lightly as it takes; it made him an ardent friend as well as a gallant enemy; it caused him to forgive as readily as to pursue; and while his head was exceedingly fertile in shifts and delighted altogether in plots against the law, human and divine, it was not within his force to refrain his heart from exulting in their remarkable subtlety, nor from inviting approbation of them from those whose fitness to approve was sometimes peculiar.

Some of these qualities of the Captain's have already been exhibited. It may be said that he had been precipitate in his alliance with the fair Nicole, peremptory in his dealings with Simon Muschamp; that he had been predatory, indeed. He had possessed himself of a heart to which Simon had had a claim, of treasure which Simon had secured for himself, of a County of Picpus: lastly, he had laid hands upon the person of Simon, had drubbed it, trussed it, put it on a shelf. Pass all these things: to the victor the spoils—he would have been the first to admit it. But then his nobility—that greatness of soul which must needs be generous with what it has not, sooner than ungenerous—entered into a plot against him. He was reproached by Madame Cornichon—or felt it a reproach—that he was a

count who took a lady into his lands, not as his countess. He could not bear that; he made her his countess. He was made next to feel very keenly the perilous tenure of the coronet which Nicole had been asked to wear, and agreed, too readily perhaps, to the remedy which she proposed. In other words, to ensure her a county which he did not possess he agreed to her assumption of a name to which she had no title. Had this been all, it had been enough; but there was more. Madame Cornichon had regretted the absence of a servant. Could a count bear that his lady should so travel through France unattended? He felt that keenly; it stung. Remembering Simon Muschamp, with whom he might well have been content to cry quits—remembering greatly, he forgave him, and set him up as a servant. He did unwisely; he started a new score on the slate, which he had to pay.

Following the course of the Garonne towards its fountain head, all went well with Captain Brazenhead until he left English territory at Maimande, and entered the tormented soil of France. Here, as he told Nicole, it was necessary to go tender-foot, to avoid cities, to lie close by day, to work in the dark. Nicole agreed to these reasonable precautions very cheerfully; she was a charming companion, full of resource, complaisant, and not easily daunted. Partly upon her advice, partly because, it will be remembered, he admired the name, he used his title of Count of Picpus whenever it was absolutely necessary

to declare himself. It may have helped him here and there, or it may not; it certainly gave him a great deal of pleasure, and he may have indulged a pardonable vanity in respect to it more than was prudent. Simon Muschamp, the Loyal Servitor, as he was pleased to call himself, used it on every occasion. There was no inn at which they baited, no smithy, no toll-gate, no ferry, no monastery in which the Captain delighted to tell his tales, where full warning had not been given beforehand of his Excellency's wealth, prowess, rank, and ancestry. The consequence of this was that the fame of Monsieur de Picpus went before and spread about him, and that when he arrived in any village the inhabitants stood to receive him with their caps held out. In these he did not fail to drop coins of silver. He endowed marriageable maidens, he gave honest youths their indentures. In or near Montauban, it is said that he touched for the evil; but I think this must be an exaggeration, although it is certainly a fact that a member of the house of Picpus had once been anti-pope for a week. Another consequence was that Simon was pretty soon able to leave the renown of M. de Picpus to take care of itself—yet another that the sack of rose-nobles became less and less inconvenient to carry.

Nevertheless, all went passably well until, in an evil hour, Captain Brazenhead fell in with Nicole's whim, and consented to diverge from his safer road—which had been across the watershed from Villemar into the valley of the Tarn—in order that she might make her offering at the

famous shrine of Saint Sernin in the city of Toulouse. He should have known better, and he did. The men of Languedoc were his detestation and derision at once. He considered that they talked too much and too loud ; he considered them vainglorious and liars, and he could not deny that they were as handy with the sword, or nearly so, as they said they were. Toulouse, again, was perilously near Perpignan, where Pym should be awaiting him and his treasure—Pym of the drooping eyelid, with the Bishop of Agde on his mind. All this the Captain urged upon his Nicole's attention, but so delicately that it is just possible she missed his apprehensions. He did not say, "My life, let us avoid Toulouse as we should the devil. If I am known in Toulouse I may be taken : if you are known there, you may be put to the bridewell or whatsoever plague of a name they give that sort of place in this country." This he did not say, but instead, taking her rosy face between his hands, smiling upon her in that easy way a man well fed is wont to take—"Why, chuck," said he, "hast thou a thanksgiving to make on my account ? Hath Heaven been so kind ? Hast thou a man at thy feet who can deny thee nothing, and must thou needs boast of that to Our Lady ? Store it up, child, in thy pretty head until we reach the good town of Albi. There is a rare church there, I know, for once when I served Burgundy I helped to sack it—and this cicatrice, look you"—he bared his right arm, and there, deep forested in hair, showed the

white scar—"came from a dint with his crosier which the Abbot of Saint-Symphorien gave me. In Albi minster shalt thou give God thanks for stout Salomon, thy lord, pretty sweeting—but not in Toulouse, as thou lovest him." Nicole pouted and withdrew her face from his hands. The Loyal Servitor intruded.

"Your pardon, sir," he said, "if I make bold to speak."

"It is granted, Simon."

"Then, sir, I say that Madame is right, and your Excellency in error."

"How so, by the Face?"

"Thus, sir. In Albi you are nearer to your mark, but further from your power of hitting it. From Toulouse—if you retire to reach it—you can spring further."

The Captain said, "I take you; I am obliged to you—enough said," which was his invariable habit when something was put to him which he did not understand. He had no more objection to offer, and Nicole once more put her face between his hands. They rode into Toulouse by nightfall the next day. This was the 15th of May.

The offering which Nicole designed for Saint Sernin's shrine was a handsome candle of ten pounds' weight. It was very necessary that it should be carried for her to the church, and indeed, as Simon pointed out, that some warning should be given to the Canons of the church of the approaching bounty. Space would be required for such a candle; the shrine might be locked, the

guardian away. Now, for a lady of the condition of Madame de Picpus to present herself with a ten-pound candle, and be kept waiting, was not to be thought of. What did his Excellency advise? His Excellency, who was sleepy and had been too early roused, was short about the candle.

"Waiting? Will they keep thy mistress waiting? There will be ears to be slit if they do, the southern swine. Go you, Simon, and tell Messieurs les Chanoines that Madame de Picpus is inclined to salute Monsieur Saint Sernin, who, if he is the gentleman I take him for, will be too much honoured by the compliment. Go you, in the devil's name, and leave me to my repose."

"I will go, sir," said Simon, and went. At a later hour Monsieur de Picpus accompanied madame to the church of Saint Sernin, which, with the Golden Violet of poets, is the chief glory of the city of Toulouse. I must be more exact. He accompanied Nicole to the door of the church, but excused himself from further attendance.

He had always had churches in suspicion, chiefly because, for fighting purposes, they cramp a man—with their doors which lead to other doors, and their cloisters, where you may chase about like a rat in a cage, and never get nearer your man, or further from him, as your case may urgently need. Outside he would admire with all the world, and there was no better judge than he of the scope of a great nave, the buttressing of chapels, the poise of a cupola, or the right proportions of flanking towers. Inside he would not

go if he could help it. "They talk Latin in there; they talk to themselves. It may be mischief they are devising; who knows? Once I was carried to church, and they put salt on my tongue, and scared me damnably, as I hear by report. Other times I have been, and once more I purpose to go; but then I shall be carried thither, and in a manner careless what tongue they choose for their conversations." He was very stout upon this matter, and the fair Nicole, whose hope it certainly was to get him to church before long, had to give way. He held aside the curtain for her, and bowed her in, and that done, he walked up and down the square, expanding his chest and spreading his cloak to the early morning sun. There was much business doing there; the market was at its height, and the chattering as shrill as that of pies in a pear-tree. Captain Brazenhead admired and was admired. The fine eyes he made, the fine figure he was—his crimson cloak, his gold ornaments, his long sword, and his thigh-boots! If he caused hearts to flutter and eyes to fall there's no wonder, for his affability was extraordinary, and Tolosan beauty is famous all the world over. But his eye was very much upon the young men, whose fine bearing pleased him, while he disapproved their clamouring.

"With some of these striplings I could do very well," he considered. "They would look well in the Picpus livery, the Picpus bannerol fluttering from their spears. A forced march, a series of them, a night surprise, the barbican

snatched, the seneschal on his knees, with the key on a cushion: I see it all. And these dark-skinned young heroes for my feudatories, crying, 'A Picpus! A Picpus!' The thought warms me. I must make a levy: it was good that I came hither, it seems. Bless the pious thought of Nicole, my countess that-is-to-be!"

These and other imaginations occupied him very pleasantly for an hour and a half. He carried them with him to the tavern of The Burning Bush, where they lost nothing by the application of strong waters to their fire. It was towards the hour of noon when he went again to the church, and sat himself upon the steps of the parvise, to wait for Nicole, and to continue his meditations. It is certain also, and not surprising, that he slept; for his nights had been broken of late, and he had much need of repose.

When he awoke it was as nearly as possible three o'clock, an hour when nobody in Toulouse with a door to his house is outside that door. Captain Brazenhead sat up with a jerk of the head, snorted, sneezed twice, and was awake. The position of the sun warned him that much time had been consumed, the state of his feelings that no food had been. Where the mischief was Madame de Picpus? Where the Loyal Servitor, one of whose first duties surely was to see that his master was filled? Before him, as he wandered, the Place Saint-Sernin stretched out, vast and arid plain of white pavement quivering with radiant heat; behind him towered up the figured side of

the church, silent, shrouded, immense, tenanted only in its topmost flight by pigeons. The mystery of all this emptiness, the irresponsiveness of the mountainous masonry, the shade in which he had slept so long, struck a chill upon him. He shivered; a premonition came to him stealthily, like the wind of an approaching storm. Upon his feet the next moment, he tried the doors; they were locked. He strode the length and breadth, the returning length of the church; all doors were locked. He was puzzled, he was uneasy, he was extremely hungry. Was it possible that Madame de Picpus had returned to the inn? Was it possible, O Heaven, that——? Before he had achieved the terrible thought that possessed him, he stopped, fell a-trembling, stooped and picked up something from the pavement. It was a flower: a clove carnation with a bitten stalk. Here, then, was the message of disaster—the one piteous cry for help which Nicole had been able to voice. This, indeed, smote him like a stroke of the sun through the shoulder-blades. He had no doubts now: he was ashy pale when he looked up.

"Now," he said, "I know the worst. My glory has faded, the chill grows. It is the hour of sunset." He made the sign of the Cross as he invoked the Saints of his innermost reverence. "Cosmas and Damian, you physicians of the soul; Martin of Tours, thou princely giver; Salomon my namesake; and you, ye Eleven Thousand Virgins, my country-women and my patterns as

well, aid me in this hour, and watch over me well. It is the hour of sunset, say you? Amen, says Brazenhead, but this sun shall go down in blood."

He threw about him his cloak of imperial dye, put his hand upon the hilt of his sword, and strode over the Place Saint-Sernin.

Tall houses stood about, fronting the church, silent all, and shuttered against the sun. A narrow arched entry, cut out of two such, was the road he elected to go. It led into a cave of dark and gloomy aspect, a lane between high, black, and unfeatured walls, whose rare windows were barred with iron and doors studded with the same. It bore the unhappy designation of the Rue des Yeux Crévés; but it led him directly to his inn, and he did not notice its name. Roland, at the closing in of the Dolorous Pass, could not have been more indifferent than he to presages of evil. Was not evil already there?

A man in a peaked cap stepped out of a doorway, a sworded man in a black cloak, a man of sinister aspect, with a bristling beard, hooked nose, and a pair of high, arched eyebrows, one higher than the other.

"Give you fair afternoon, sir," said he, with what Brazenhead felt to be ironic intention. He took it up as it was meant.

"It is a very foul afternoon," said he shortly, "and you shall give me nothing."

The man stopped, drawing back his head, and presenting a shoulder.

"Do you bandy words, swordsman? Are you for a play?"

"By Cock, and I bandy what you please," says the Captain. "I have heavy thoughts, and a heavy hand at a play."

Then his man came towards him, peaking his head like a running bird. "You are uncivil, sir, look you," says he, "and that may not be with a gentleman of Toulouse."

Captain Brazenhead threw open his cloak. "I have yet to learn that I am," he said.

"*Touché!*" cried the man, and whistled on his fingers.

Immediately the entry seemed to swarm with men, who came from all sides and in all manners, like conspirators from a wood in a tragedy. Two let themselves down from an upper window, one came running up from the archway behind him, two more from the angle, others from doorways in recesses. All were armed, and all in a hurry; and even as they came on, the first arrival had drawn his blade and was pressing our Captain. This was an ambush, it was clear, and promised to go hard with its victim.

He did all that a man could, encompassed by so cloudy a host. Planting himself against the wall, his cloak against his left arm for a shield, his sword whisking now here, now there—it was a truly terrific defence. And as he fought he sang gaily to himself, his troubles forgot. Or he talked, "Bristles beware, thou fightest Brazenhead! Ah,

that was shrewdly encountered, boy of Shrewsbury !

> 'The maid looked up, the maid looked down,
> With never a word to say—a'

Why, scullion, if thou wilt have it, have it and hold"—and here to a creeping ruffian, who had come on all-fours behind to hamstring him with a bill, he gave his death-blow between the shoulders, and withdrew the sword in the nick of time to parry a lunge from his first opponent and to flesh him deeply in the groin. He disarmed yet another ; but when two came at him together, and a third, clambering from the projecting grating of a window, cut at his head with a halberd, his attention was distracted, and a wound in the forearm maddened him. Coolness deserted him ; for a moment or two he saw all the passage one burning red ; then, like the tortured bull in the ring, he went blindly to his destruction, leapt upon his coupled foes, grappled and fell with them. There was a crowded moment of snorting, tussling, and stabbing on the ground, and for one man at least it was his last. But he who had stood in the window jumped from his advantage into the *mêlée*, and, alighting in the small of the Captain's back, knocked him, as he said, "all ways at once ;" others came to help . . . all was over. Captain Brazenhead, in chains, was haled to the Donjon, and there for the present he must remain.

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT LEVY

THE window, to call it so, of the prison in which our Captain lay for three weeks, looked upon the elegant belfry of Saint Godoi, church of that pious hero who was first a slave, then a Christian, then an archbishop, and then all three at once, until martyrdom was added as a perfect distinction from all other slaves, Christians and archbishops; and upon this belfry in the early day of his incarceration a couple of pigeons had set up their nest, and used to delight him with their innocent demonstrations of affection. Occasionally they harrowed his feelings, for he could not but remember, "Thus, ah, God, I might have kissed the neck of the lovely Madame de Picpus!" or "Thus, in my courtly fashion, I might have swelled before my countess, thus bowed and curvetted before her, and thus—aha!" A spasm of baffled hope would interrupt him here, and turn him to other relaxations of his hard leisure—such as the taming of a mouse, study of the architecture of Saint Godoi's belfry, or attacks upon the virtue of the

gaoler's daughter, a personable Tolosan, who brought him bread and water twice a day. But she gave him to understand that she could not abide a hairy man, since her affections were unalterably set upon a canon of the cathedral. He had no notion of the state of her feelings, she said; but that made no difference. Where the treasure is, there will the heart be, and she had rather listen to his blackbird notes in choir, and think with unencumbered mind upon his smooth person than be the promised bride of Cyrus, King of Persia, or two Roman emperors. So piteous a tale of true love unrequited touched Captain Brazenhead's heart, and he took a vow of celibacy, and kept it until he was released from prison, when—— But I anticipate.

Severe scrutiny was cast upon him when two of the consuls of Toulouse, with scribes and men-at-arms, visited his cell; but no direct accusation was brought against him, and there was no talk of a trial. High crimes and misdemeanours were hinted at. It was said that he had refused to enter a church; and men had been burned for less than that. He had attacked six citizens and wounded four of them; he had publicly cursed the city of Toulouse. All this—the paucity of such charges—was very encouraging, and disposed Captain Brazenhead to be eloquent. It was plain that they knew nothing of Pym, of the Bishop of Agde and his necessities: it was plain, in short, that one could do no harm and might do much good by copious lying.

"When you are in a strait," the Captain was fond of saying, "it is far better to be eloquent than terse. For if you tell your adversary many things, mixing the true with the false, he is certain to believe you a liar and to doubt most of what you tell him. If among the many things he disbelieves the truth is not included, then you are a bungler, and deserve what you get."

Captain Brazenhead was therefore eloquent. If the consuls had been Moses and Aaron, and Captain Brazenhead a rock in Canaan—if their charges against him had been the staff with which they struck him, and his speech the miraculous result—then all that can be said is, the Children of Israel had been drowned. He soused them with periods; they cast up their hands from his words like foundering men. One scribe wore his pen down to the feathers and the other drank the ink, as if he would write with his fingers. The last phrase actually written down was, "Oh, perverse and malignant generation of the latter days of the once inclyte and hierophantic city of Toulouse, where I, descended from the Emperors of Byzantium, like another Prometheus, give fire to men and perish at the entrails——" and the reason why the sentence was never finished was that the consuls were running about the room calling for help, and that the scribe who had drunk the ink was ill. Among other facts insisted upon by Captain Brazenhead three stand out as particularly significant: (1) that he was the seventh child

of a seventh child, born in the seventh month; (2) that he was Count of Picpus in Savoy; and (3) that for two cocks of the eye he would have the life of every man in the room with a bootjack. The first and third of these propositions they could not, for obvious reasons, dispute; but the second contained highly contentious matter, and would certainly have been doubted had there been time. It was not until the prisoner's torrent had ceased to flow and the consuls had bowed themselves out and collected their wits at the foot of the stairs that they remembered the only thing they had found opportunity to say in departing, which was that he should hear further from them. And their difficulties were to decide whether he *should* hear from them, whether he would, and whether if he should or would, he would have anything left to reply. These grave questions were still in debate when events took the very surprising turn which it is now my duty to relate.

Captain Brazenhead, after sleeping off the fatigues of so much language, observed and was delighted to observe from his window the next morning that the pigeons were about to harvest their amorous husbandry; that, in other words, they were about to become parents. A nest was in making, simple in construction, but of entire efficacy. The hen bird, with head nestled into crop, and no feet to be seen, couched fluffily within a coign of the masonry; by her side her mate stood erect, a straw in his beak. The nest

was thus symbolised, and all was well; but whether two eggs were laid instead of one and he was stimulated to new efforts, or whether he dropped the straw and had to seek another, I know not. The facts are that he presently flew down, was absent for some little time, and that when he returned he bore in his beak the stalk and, upheld by that, the drooping head of a clove carnation. Captain Brazenhead, in his narrow cell, gave a great cry and then stood very still, while his heart beat like the hopper of a mill, and a tear furrowed each war-worn cheek and fertilized the roots of each moustachio. "Lo, now I know that my star rides clear of clouds, high in heaven. Venus, goddess of the heart, I thank thee! Netted Mars, receive the praises of thy doting imp!" He sat with folded arms upon his bed, awaiting his release; and the gaoler's daughter might ogle him till midnight in vain.

It is to be believed that the Captain, meditating profoundly upon Destiny, never shifted his posture all night; the fact is that he was found bolt upright upon his bed when the gaoler's daughter came into his cell at six o'clock in the morning with a jug of sour wine and a crust of stale bread. His mouse, which had been taught punctuality at meals, was upon the forefinger of his left hand, in a posture indicative of suspense and supplication. Suspense was also indicated by the Captain's posture, but not supplication by any means.

"A fair day to you, sir," said the damsel.

"You make all days fair, lady," he replied; "yet I tell you that this day is the fairest that ever I saw." She looked very wise.

"You little know what's astir in our town, that's very plain," said she, "or you would not prophesy at random. Fair indeed! The tale runs that you are to be burned to-day as a scandalous liver; and however I trusted myself in your company, after hearing such a character of you, I shall never understand. Why, you might take advantage of me at any moment—and no doubt but you will, if I do not fortify myself with all my virtue."

Captain Brazenhead listened to this provocative speech with attention; but most of his attention seemed directed to his mouse.

"You mustn't tell me," he said presently, "that omens are nothing, because I know better. I remember very well dreaming once upon a time that a man walked down a green meadow with a flaming brand in his hand, and wherever he dropped fire snakes followed after him. 'This is the day! This is the day! This is the day!' he called out thus three times, and I awoke and went about my business; and that day Jack Pounce drove me in the guts with the handle of a broom, and I slew him—or as good as slew him. So now you may see, my dear."

The gaoler's daughter looked serious. "Alas!" she said, "I see that I am nothing to you, sir."

"That's my belief," said Captain Brazenhead, feeding his mouse with breadcrumbs.

Nothing occurred to justify the prisoner's confidence until a quarter before eleven in the forenoon of that day; but then he was justified. Steps resounded up the stairs, the steps of many, steel-shod; his door was struck three times. "This is the day," said Captain Brazenhead in a shocked whisper; and then, clearing his throat, he cried them in. Bolts, locks, and bars creaked his release. Two consuls, a herald, and a stranger in steel, stood in the entry. The consuls bowed, the herald stepped forward.

"Count of Picpus——" he opened; Captain Brazenhead stood up and folded his arms over an inflated chest.

"He is before you."

"From the puissant and excellent lord the Viscount of Turenne—these letters," and handed out a sealed writ.

Now Captain Brazenhead could not read, had never been able to master that branch of science. He waved his hand twice before his face.

"Let me hear your letters," he said, re-folded his arms and frowned upon the herald, who read:

"COUNT OF PICPUS,

"I direct you by the faith and allegiance which you owe me as a vassal, to repair instantly to the domain of Les-Baux in the County of Provence, there to resume possession

in my name and title of the castle and good town, denying all access thereto to the Lady Roesia Des-Baux, until such time as I shall appear before it and demand an account of you. And for so doing let this be your sufficient warrant, as witness my hand.

"LE VICOMTE DE TURENNE."

This ended, folded, and put into Captain Brazenhead's hands, the two consuls bowed to him and to each other, and Captain Brazenhead said, "It is well. I am ready. Lead on."

He knew the Viscount of Turenne excellently by reputation, as all Aquitaine knew him too well. *Flail of Provence* he was called, and relished the title. A greater man than the King of Aragon, as good a man as the King of France south of the Loire, and not much inferior to the Duke of Burgundy himself, he was yet a simple land pirate, but the most famous ever known in Gaul. Captain Brazenhead had not suspected his finger to be in the sauce when Pym revealed what he chose; there was no doubt that a different tinge was cast over the Bishop's affair by the fact; and there was no doubt that Captain Brazenhead, expanding in the full sun at the door of his prison, felt himself uplifted.

"And where," said he to the obsequious herald, "is my good friend the Viscount to be found? Where are his knees, between which these two hands have so often been folded? Where is his ringed right hand, which these lips

have so properly kissed that in the old days he was more than once suspected of a chilblain?"

It was explained to him that the Viscount was by no means in these parts, but believed to be at Macon, where he had a castle, and held his court. Details had been left to his lordship of Picpus, who would find a sufficient force in the garrison, and an escort in this city of Toulouse. Captain Brazenhead rubbed his chin.

"More than escort is needful to a man of my quality, herald—much more than escort. Overpowered by some fifty villains of this place, I was robbed, ravished, undone. For three weeks I have lived upon rye bread and stale water. I require to dine, to be clothed, armed, sworded, harnessed, accoutred, put in fettle, taught my value in the world. You will find me an apt pupil, quick, retentive, avid of learning. Begin then, begin. I require good money, and much of it."

The herald was chapfallen. "Alas, dear sir, that is the one article which is lacking in the equipment I am able to offer to your lordship. Money! Ah, that is a branch of learning somewhat neglected in our country. We are paid, or pay ourselves, in kind. We call it levying a contribution——"

"It matters not what you call it, one snap of the fingers," said Captain Brazenhead. "The point is whether you get what you do levy."

"Sir, we mostly do," said the herald, "though our company is called the *Tard-venus*."

"Late-come is often best served," said the Captain. "Prove me your words. Levy me a larded capon stuffed with black beans in half an hour from now. Levy me a quart of red wine, a manchet of bread and some garlic, and I shall believe you."

"You shall be gratified, my lord," said the herald. "At The Pheasant in half an hour."

"I shall be there," said the Count of Picpus, spreading himself in the sun.

He levied the services of a barber, and needed them, for his beard was prodigious. In the barber's shop he found a young gallant with a sword three sizes too big for him, and with the aid of a razor or two he levied that. The young man made a great outcry, and was for summoning the town guard, so there was nothing for it but to levy the young man. Captain Brazenhead bound him to the service of the Flail of Provence by the promise of a duchy and a pension, and the threat of instant chastisement upon a sensitive part, and that in the Place Saint-Symphorien at ten o'clock in the morning, if he refused. An oath was delivered and received, which, as it is rather blasphemous, though terrible, I omit.

Then Captain Brazenhead dined at The Pheasant so sumptuously and well that he made one of the greatest levies of his life. I mean when he appeared before the consuls of Toulouse in full conclave, and levied ten thousand crowns as indemnity for the affront put upon the person of the Viscount Turenne's old ally Salomon

de Picpus, Count of Picpus in Dauphiné. He did this single-handed, save for the assistance of his herald, who had been instructed to blow three blasts on his trumpet whenever he saw his master pause for a word. The long sword levied from the young man in the barber's shop was of great assistance: it looked at its best naked; but the greatest ally he had was his profound experience of men. Upon this he drew, or, rather, built until he himself was astonished at the edifice he reared, and steadied himself with a "Gently does it—go not too far, Brazenhead, my ancient." The caution was timely. To pluck the Emperor of the East by the beard, to kiss his daughter under an apple tree, to humiliate profoundly his eldest son, these are pleasant and creditable facts; but when it comes to excommunicating the Pope in his own basilica, or twisting the Duke of Burgundy round your finger, or cutting the consuls of Toulouse in pieces in each other's presence, difficulties arise which can only be solved one way: that is, by performing the prodigies you boast of.

But, after all, the money is the great thing; and Captain Brazenhead got that, had it brought in, in leather sacks, from the treasury, counted in his presence and bestowed at his headquarters, before the sun went down upon his wrath. With some of the ransom he gave a great feast to the civic authorities, with other some he made the fountains of the city run white wine and red, and lighted a bonfire in the Field of Arms. He

bought a banner with his blazon, he repaired his wardrobe and provided a horse; and then upon a certain day in June he set forth for his affair at the head of an escort of five-and-thirty scoundrels —all young, all greedy, and all liars.

CHAPTER VII

THE YOUNG MAN BAREFOOT

THE greatest liar then in France, if not all Christendom, was, no doubt, Captain Brazenhead; but he had occasion to distrust his distinction when he fell in with Tristan Paulet.

The manner of his meeting and the matter of his discourse were alike romantic and extraordinary; and romance was a particular foible of our Captain's. There are some whose roving eye is only to be arrested by distortion, and he was one. If a lady should be partially undressed when she ought to be dressed, clean when she might have been dirty, dirty when cleanliness were the proper; if a young man distracted should refuse to trim his nails, hair or behaviour, should decide to wear no stockings or three hats; if on a lonely heath he should come upon a damsel wounded in the side, or see two lovers with bleeding lips kissing in the snow—Captain Brazenhead's heart beat high, and he was the utter servant of any such person or pair of persons before they had time or need to invoke his chivalry. There were many like him, and have

been many since. If sin were not a distortion, vice would not be so exceedingly romantic, and folks would sin no more. Broadly speaking, every sinner is a poet—but I have no wish to enter upon a discussion.

Captain Brazenhead led his devoted band, as his ardent imagination drew him instantly to believe it, by devious ways to the east, since he wished, very reasonably, to avoid Agde and the country round about it. He even went so far north as Albi by the valley of the Tarn, continued north-east to Saint-Affrique, crossed the stony hills thereabouts, reached Le Vigan, and thence had the full intention of descending into the plain by Quissac, of fording the Vidourle at Sommières, and of reaching Arles without adventuring the hospitalities of Nîmes; but at a little town called Ganges he varied his plans, for there he met the Young Man Barefoot.

He had tempered in his course justice—or, let me say, hunger—with mercy, had put no man to the sword, had spared the fatherless and widows, and had levied his needs only from the exorbitantly well-to-do. He had threatened to hang the Abbot of Saint-Beauzely, but, as he said himself, there's precisely a rope's difference between doing and promising; and the Abbot, who was homing from a round of his granges, could well afford it. It was the discovery that he could have afforded very much more which annoyed Captain Brazenhead—or the Count of Picpus, as he must now be called—and caused

him to be truculent in his first dealings with the Young Man Barefoot, when he saw him in a leafy gorge, sitting upon a rock with his bare feet in a pool, his bare head crowned with a chaplet of faded roses, a lute on his knee and a wallet by his side, which the count erroneously supposed to hold money.

The young man, who was of pleasing shape and feature—elegant, fair, and perfectly beardless—like a true son of the country, had not the slightest concern who overheard him at his elegiacs, or who might see his disordered dress. It was sufficient for him that his doings were a solace; and that ought, he would have said, to be sufficient for all but the idle impertinent. He was singing at the top of his voice some bitter-sweet *lai* of Provence; every now and again he paused and plucked a chord out of his rote, and the consonance thus evoked seemed to inspire him; for almost at once he began another stanza—evidently not meditated before, and never faltered either in the rhymes, which were complicated, or in the diction, which was florid; but rounded off his stave with what seemed to his fancy a perfect line—

"Ah, God, I part from Roesia!"

struck another chord, and began anew the chase for rhymes. When the hunt was fairly up, trust him to find them. This saved his life.

The Count of Picpus had halted his men at

the head of the gorge, and himself had taken in hand the dealing with this singular young man. Soft-footed, very like a cat, he had crept among the rocks and brushwood about which the water tumbled and swirled, until now, hidden in cistus bushes, his drawn sword shuddering in his hand, he was immediately behind his intended victim. He had been contraried by learning of the deceit of the Abbot of Saint-Beauzely, whereby he had taken silver when he might have had gold, and was determined that blood must flow. "He shall finish the verse," he said to himself, "and then he shall be cleft to the navel, by Cock." All unconscious, an innocent and male Scheherazade, the young man plucked another chord, and opened a new vista of rhymes in *oesia*. "Proud king of Babylon!" said our hero, "is it possible that he is again working towards his parting with Roesia? He'll never do it." But he did, and the Captain waited for him. Once more and yet once more he sprang into the saddle and gave the rein to his Pegasus; once more and yet once more he parted perfectly from Roesia. At the end of the third bout his meditating slayer could not restrain himself, but cast aside his sword, uttering a great cry, and throwing himself beside the astonished young man, embraced him warmly and went so far as to kiss him.

The singer gently released himself. "You flatter me, sir, I fancy," he said, "but I must beg you—in consequence of a vow I have made —to let me alone with my misery."

"And what is your vow, what is your misery, O wonder of our age?" cried the Count of Picpus, with a grim but friendly hand on his shoulder. "I tell you, gentleman, I have travelled far and heard good poetry. I have been in Italy; and if I never heard Dan Petrarch, I have wept at his grave. Singers I have heard at Avignon, by no means proper men, but the sweeter-piped for that, and singers in Byzantium —large-eyed and full-throated women, all at the disposition of the Emperor of those parts. They rhymed, or they did not, as suited their fancy, and nobody cared; but never, since Christ was king, was there rhyming like yours. Will you tell me, for example—I am myself a poet, thinking it not robbery of my countship—how many rhymes you conceive there to be to Roesia? . . . Ha! Roesia!"

A surprising change came over his lordship's face, which was as if the sun, though shining still, had suddenly turned cruel-cold. All was now hard that had been temperately genial; all was accentuated which had been merely a pleasant mottling. Deep furrows revealed themselves between his eyebrows, deep scars on either side of his moustachios, which climbed and tossed up their tendrils beyond them like bryony over a crevice in the rocks. His eyes grew very light, and the pupils of them focussed down to pin-points of intense black. *Roesia!* A grim surmise. He spoke in a whisper.

"Is it possible—is it then possible—that your

be-rhymed Roesia is the Lady Roesia Des-Baux, upon whose affairs I . . . ?"

The young man coloured, but stiffened nevertheless at the neck.

"It is not only possible, it is certainly the case," he said. "But why do you ask?"

"I always ask a man for the facts before I slay him," said the Count of Picpus, and bared his right arm to the elbow. The young man regarded his feet in the water.

"It would be far more to my purpose if you were to cut off my feet instead of my head—which I presume is your usual practice," he said. "Of what good are feet to me when every function of theirs is to take me further from Roesia? Whereas with my head I could sigh, weep, make verses, divert myself and—as it seems—my persecutors, and do no harm to anybody. But upon the general principle I should wish to know how you can conceive an enmity for a man who is *leaving* a lady? Had I been meeting her I could have understood it."

"You may have undone her," said the Count, biting his moustachios.

"That," said the young poet in reply, "would have been against the rules of my profession, and very unbecoming in me, who have been a retainer in her guardian's castle. I doubt, too, whether she—— But a truce to such considerations. Have I not told you that we have parted?"

"And I," said Captain Brazenhead, "am here

to tell you that you are about to part for ever—by means of this blade."

"Our love," said the young man, "was madness, brief and glorious as it was mad. We met, looked long at each other, we trembled and were mute in each other's presence; we were alone by chance, we drew together, we touched, we fell a-kissing. And then the floodgates of the tongue were loosed, and all heaven might have wondered at the praises we had for one another. They were praises such as in those courts are reserved for the Highest; yet they were all too weak to satisfy us. I became as one upon whose lips has lit the live coal spoken of by the Prophet. Never was such poetry as mine for the most glorious, regal young lady that ever touched this earth with her foot, pausing upon her flight to the skies—and liked it not, and sighed and soared upward. This continued for I know not how long—can a man cipher when he is in love, and beloved? Out upon your calculations! We met before dawn, in the breathless noons, after dark—our hearts could not beat apart—we lay, I suppose, panting for mere breath until we were together. I forbear to tell you of our bliss——"

"Not in the least," said his intending slayer. "You have a pleasant touch upon pleasant things. I, too, have been in bliss," and here he sighed and bit his nails.

"We became over-bold—our need was so imperious that we could not help ourselves. We were summoned before the court of the Green

Wood upon an indictment for Excessive Comfort in Gallantry. It was said that since the greatest glory of the lover is to suffer for his lady, I was clearly a defaulter, seeing I suffered nothing, but was as happy as a king or a shepherd. I defended myself—I think—strenuously and well; but the court's mind was made up, and I was not allowed to finish. I was cast in damages; I was to serve another lady for three weeks, while my adored Roesia was to choose another lover. I was contumacious, I refused to bow to the court's ruling. And so I was banished with all the formalities usual in such cases. Suffer! I have suffered now as damned men suffer. Heat, cold, a gnawed liver, a broken heart, a brain on fire—oh, soldier, and you propose to slay me! Why, do you not know that by such an act you would waft me into Paradise? For say that you soused me in hell's deeps, by so doing you would be ridding me of the ineffable tortures in which I writhe now." You would have said that the speakers had changed places had you seen them. The young man was in command, the poet led the talk. The man of blood wondered at him, his sword lifeless in his hand.

Having conquered his emotion by apparently swallowing it, the broken lover proceeded:

"The laws of Provence," he said, "vague and indeterminate as they are in most of the regards of life, are extremely precise upon all that concerns the tenderer relations of the sexes. Here, I may say, the law has been digested.

There is no act or motion, overt or implied, from a sigh at eventime to a kiss, from a clasp of the hand to a clipping of the loved body, for which due provision has not been made. You may imagine, therefore, that such a tremendous doom as that of ours was executed to the utmost punctilio. I was to go to the University of Toulouse to study jurisprudence; and she—the lovely Roesia—must accompany me a full half of the way. Those more fortunate lovers who remained in the good court of King Réné—for our tragedy had been enacted there, on the orchard-terraces, under the shaded colonnades of Aix-en-Provence—were to be our escort. Our brows were bound with myrtle, and our necks linked—poor prisoners!—with chains of anemones; we were set in the midst of the bevy upon white mules caparisoned in red; and whenever one of us leaned aside to kiss the other one of the company sang a *lai*. Owing to this laudable custom it fell out that between Aix and Beaucaire, where we were torn apart, each member of the company had sung some five times."

"And was the company a large one?" the Captain asked him.

"It was large," said the young man; "nearly a hundred pairs of lovers must have been there."

"Then," said Captain Brazenhead, after a rapid calculation on his fingers, "you kissed Dame Roesia a thousand times."

"That is exactly true, sir," he replied. "I should have kissed her more freely, if there

had been time; but the intervals were fully occupied."

"*Mort-de-Dieu!* by listening to the *lais?*"

"No, sir; for you can listen to poetry and kiss at the same time. They were occupied by her kissing of me."

"I admire!" said the Captain. "And I had thought myself a good blade. But you are my equal. Continue."

"Alas, sir," said the young man, with tears gathering fast in his eyes; "what am I to tell you now? Hard by Beaucaire, where the final separation must take place—a ceremony which promised to be of the most heart-piercing you can conceive of—our gay company of lovers was confronted by the bristling menace of war. A troop of grim ruffians—going, as it seemed, to the fair at Nîmes, but as apt at murder as at tumbling—called us a halt. They were numerous, but so were we; they were desperate for plunder, armed with bills, scythes, sickles, clubs and other tools of sharp death—while our arms, to call them so, were lutes and viols. One, the ringleader, sat squarely upon a horse and called us to halt. I should add that a woman of the horde, one of many drabs with them, but the comeliest, though unshod and wounded dreadfully in the feet, led a bear, which, prodded with a staff, set up a dismal roaring, and added no little to our dismay."

"Your dismay," said the Captain, "is paltry to me. Proceed with the material parts of your tale."

"Our dismay," rejoined the youth, "was most material to us; but, however, our names and conditions were required of us—and when it was reported to the chief of these cut-throats that the Lady Roesia Des-Baux was of our party—and easily the chief of it (for all that a king's daughter was there, one of her honourable women, in the Psalmist's phrase)—bills were levelled, bows drawn taut, slaughter whistled down the wind; half the virgins and all the poets of Provence had been dismembered or worse, had not my lovely Roesia—oh, Mother of God, the pious act!—delivered herself as a hostage to the chief of the pirates. I saw her turn her mule to face with his great horse; I saw him lay hand upon the rein; I cried, I raised my hands to Heaven, I fell in a swoon. More I know not, save that if I do not weep tears of blood it is because the well of my blood is frozen hard, and I suffer from a congestion."

"And who, by Cock, was this pirate who dared lay hands upon the Lady Roesia Des-Baux, with whom only I have to deal?"

"He was an unwashed vagabond, I assure you, for all that he averred himself to be the Count of Picpus," said his young friend.

The Captain's eyes protruded like a rabbit's.

"Hein? The Count of Pic——?"

"—pus," said the young man. "A pale and circumspect nobleman—if indeed a nobleman—narrow-faced, with straight hair, tawdry in accoutrements, on a tall though meagre Flemish stallion. A bâton in his right hand, a notched sword

without scabbard at his thigh. He wore a spur, and by his side there walked that fair woman I told you of, who led the bear, and was unshod. She had a red flower in her mouth. A buxom woman, with a shape——"

"Ha!" cried Captain Brazenhead, with a sound like the shock of water on a cliff; "Ha!" and his lower jaw fell sideways, and his head seemed to fall after it. He remained staring and mumbling for a space of time; and then stared upwards, as if he would rend the blue veil of heaven. "A narrow-faced, pale, lank-haired rogue—a-horseback, on a Flemish horse! Beside him a fair woman with a taking shape, ha! Oh, damned villain! Oh, traitor! And she to walk, and lead a bear, and he to ride—a red flower in her mouth, ha! Madame de Picpus, Nicole la Grâce-de-Dieu, by God's son! And Simon the singing-man, by Cock and his father!" He was livid in the face, his eyes all white. He shut his mouth with a snap, and swallowed a meat-fly. Then, after a moment of very natural—if bitter—reflection, he lifted his hand, pointed his fore-finger and fixed the Young Man Barefoot with his humid eyes, while he thus addressed him.

CHAPTER VIII

BRAZENHEAD "LOQ."

"I AM the true Count of Picpus, descended from a hundred kings, that deeply-wronged man who addresses thee now, boy, and swears to thee by the souls of the count and countess, my father and mother, and by those of all the kings my ancestors, that by no means blood alone can avenge the offences put upon me by a shaveling out of a choir. Him I have nurtured as at a breast, and taught the art of war; him I have dressed and undressed, admitted to my familiarity and secret designs. I have saved him from divers dangers—as, when he was like to be a thief, I have chastened him and removed temptation from his eyes; and when I found him strapped and gagged on a shelf, whose but these hands untied him, set him upon a horse, and made him body-servant to the proudest pair in France? And now, O listening Heaven, that he should steal away both name and mate!" He lifted his hands. "O Countess! O Nicole la Grâce-de-Dieu! Partner of my throne, sweet my bed-fellow, loveliest, tenderest, wisest of the fair

daughters of France, where and whose art thou? Out of what garden ground hast thou thy emblem? Who put it, blushing for pride, between thy lips? What is thy condition—poor, barefoot lamb, that shouldst ride spurning over the necks of such as this Muschamp? Heart of mine, hath he undone thee? Grey villain, bleak-faced fox, thou shalt smart for this! Ah, maw-worm, ah, louse upon the Muse's locks——"

"I gather, sir, from your distress," said the young man, "that some pirate has debauched your lady."

"That is the truth of it," said the Captain. "What next?" Once checked in his eloquence, he was usually attentive.

"Why, sir," said the young man, "I am reminded of an Italian saw which it may comfort you to rehearse. It says—

'Bocca baciata non perde ventura;
Anzi rinnuova come fa la luna.'"

"I know it," said the Captain, "and thank you for it. It says that there's kissing yet in a kissed mouth—and goes further and deeper. By Cock, and I agree with the Italian; but the devil is, how am I to put that to the proof?"

"We must find your lady, my lord."

"Assuredly. And yours, dear sir. They are now together."

"Ah," said the young man, "my case is worse than yours, as you can see."

"I'll be shortly damned if I can," quoth the Count of Picpus.

"You have reminiscences, you have experiences——"

"We all have," said the count.

"Mine," replied his friend, "are not worth talking of. What! A kiss or two in the dark, or behind a hedgerow! A touch of the hand under a cloak! Pooh, my lord—look at yours, rather."

The count dreamed, and as he dreamed his chest swelled, and he swept his moustachios upwards, making fierce attacks upon their strength.

"She had a taking shape," he said tenderly; "I saw it in a moment, as she handled the mop. She was bound to be mine." He ruminated for a little, then started to his feet and glared up and down the ravine. "Come!" he said, "let us find our wives."

"Our wives, my lord!" cried the young man.

"You shall have your Roesia, I tell you," said the Count of Picpus. "Your news of this day is worth a hundred Roesias. Besides, she is mine to give you, as I will tell you upon the road. Come, shall I sing you a song? I, too, am a poet, not unremarkable in a host."

As he sat there easily on the rock, roaring his piece, he made a fine figure in the sun—a figure from which the golden head and slim shape of the Young Man Barefoot, couched at his feet, by no means detracted. His head was erect, one elbow

crooked so that the hand might grasp at his hip; with the other extended, he see-sawed the air to the cadences he uttered. A keen light shone in his eyes, and his strong face glowed and shone. He was not ridiculous because he was uplifted and furiously in earnest. He was triumphantly lover and poet; the wings of his spirit brushed the sublime. And thus he sang or bellowed—

"Ye nymphs and swains of Venus' grove,
Ye vagabonds of Love!
Oh, may the myrtle and the may,
The spurge, the laurel, rose and bay,
Your right ascendance prove!"

The young man's feats with rhymes in *oesia* undid the Captain, who plunged on thus—

"Oh, Love above!
Oh, Death beneath!
Oh, balmy Dove!
Oh, poisonous breath!
By song to prove
The matter of
My heart's—— "

"Accursed Death, thou hast undone me!" he said, and bit his nails.

There had been enough of this sort to cause the listener considerable disturbance—so much so that the singer perceived it, and said with some abruptness—

"That is the poet I am. You may take it or leave it."

"Sir," said the young man after a pause, "you put me to some embarrassment. If I take

it I play traitor to my part; if I leave it I break my parole."

Captain the Count of Picpus said that he hoped not.

"But you do, sir, you do indeed," replied Tristan Paulet. "Your poetry—if I must speak plainly—seems to me of extreme badness. Indeed, I don't suppose that there can be in the whole world a worse poet than yourself—unless it be in Aix, where I had to endure many ignoble rivalries."

"I fancy that you are near the mark, my young gentleman," said his lordship. "I cannot myself believe that there is a worse. And, mind you, that's a distinction. There is nothing mean for me. I am for ever *in extremis*—the best if I can; if not, then the worst. But let us be going; if I am a bad poet I am a worse enemy, as the singing-man shall find. Oh, dog and dog's son—my wife and my county chained to his wrist—and he as happy as the fleas in your bed!"

His moustachios bristled like teasels' heads. He rose and blew a blast upon his horn which caused blood to flow at the ears of the Young Man Barefoot.

"My *rascaille* will hear and obey, you will find," said he. "They know that signal."

The young man surmised that they would know it in Paris.

CHAPTER IX

THE GREAT RECOVERY

THE Captain-Count moved his men onwards in open order, in the direction which he supposed the traitor Simon to have taken, which must needs be due south; for plunder being his sole object, it followed as the night the day that he was going to sell the Lady Roesia to the Bishop of Agde if he could, or to the Viscount of Turenne if he could not. But he judged that he would first try the bishop, being a singing-man, used to dealing with prelates.

And he had judged well. They had not crossed two ridges of hills before, upon the third, he spied a caravan, and gave a great shout, and spurred forward. Here his better feelings prevailed over his better judgment—for that shout was heard, and had immediate effect upon the decamping army. They were seen to halt upon their hill; they were seen to be in confusion; Simon himself was seen standing up in his stirrups, haranguing his fellow-thieves. And women—harrowing sight!—were there: one, sitting,

nourished a baby—two lay prone and slept, one's head upon the other's shoulder. And with tears of blood the Captain saw one sit apart beside a bear, and lean her fair head upon his tousled pelt, as if with weariness fordone.

"Oh, Saints on your golden thrones!" he groaned. "Send me there quickly with a sword of flame!"

Soon there was a hasty resolution taken upon that distant hill, due, no doubt, to the advance of the rescuers. The horde of thieves scattered like smoke among the cistus and box bushes. Scarcely a trace was left behind. Yet Tristan declared that he saw something white fluttering there by a slender tree—fluttering up there like a rag blown by the wind.

He saw truly and well. A woman was bound, with her back to a tree; a young woman, a slim young woman, a beautiful, slim, young woman—her head drooping to her bosom, her face hidden by shrouds of dark hair.

Tristan, crying "Roesia! my Roesia!" slipped from the Captain's pillion and ran up the hill, shouting at random as he went, "Roesia! I come. Heart of mine, I am here! I, Tristan, thy lover, am here!" She looked up, she bent her head sideways to see him. In a moment more his arms were about her, his lips had found hers, and were well advanced in their second thousand by the time the Captain-Count of Picpus could see what he was about.

He was touched, while he could not approve. "Pretty, pretty—but the act of a fool. He will break her arms off at the wrists." Dismounting, he went forward, drawing a long knife and stepping up gingerly, tiptoe like a trespasser—"By your leave, gentles," says he, and cut the cords. The lovers fell into each other's arms, the soldiery admired, but his lordship turned his back upon a happiness too great for him to contemplate.

He called his troop to attention. "Sirs," he said, "I have a deed of vengeance to perform, and shall perform it alone. I require of you upon your faith and fealty to remain here guarding that kissing couple. My intentions in their regard are benevolent and just—but they must await my personal needs. They are innocently and happily engaged. Let no man pry upon their pleasures, but face about, the Company—face due north, you peering scoundrels—and the man who looks round him shall be even as Lot's lady was when I return, for, by Cock, I'll carve a pillow out of him with this blade, which hot tears shall salt! Eyes front! About! Turn!" They turned as on pivots, and the Captain, leaping to the saddle, careered across the hill-top.

Like a setting-dog he hunted across and across, descending gradually towards the valley, where a river scurried among rocks to join the Rhone. He found lurking scoundrels without number—hot-eyed, peering, scared scoundrels—

but found not Simon. Women also, bedraggled and loose-shifted; but not the lovely Nicole. And so at last he came down to the mouth of the river, and there he might easily have missed him, for the rocks were piled, and densely covered with scrub.

But a resolute pair of grey eyes saw what a keen pair of pink ears had heard, and Nicole la Grâce-de-Dieu in the nick of time struck the brown bear with her staff as she crouched beside her sharp-set tyrant. The bear, as fire had taught him, set up his watery roar, and Captain Brazenhead, with a "Ha, Dieu!" which caused Simon's heart to stand still, turned his horse and spurred straight as a die to the covering rock. He was on his feet in a moment; he saw his prey, and the wind whistled shrill through his teeth as he drew it.

"Oh, Simon, Simon!" was all he could say. "Oh, Simon, Simon! what a meeting have we here!" He advanced lightly, like a gallant meeting his partner in the dance, and plucked up the screaming man by the ears of his head. Nicole, meantime, blushing very charmingly, did her best with the rags upon her to meet her true love's gaze.

But he never looked at her yet. He was concerned with the wretch whom he held.

He stopped his squealing by a simple means. He stuffed his mouth with thistles which he tore from between the rocks. Then he meditated profoundly, holding Simon with one hand, while

with the other he clasped his chin. Never a word spake he, never a glance gave he to the fair woman; he thought as never before—and presently proceeded to action. His prize was too good for haste. Yes, yes—he would save up Simon.

With the bear's chain he firmly bound his victim, face to the tail, upon the beast's broad back. Simon's feet were fettered under the bear's belly. Simon's hands were bound behind his own back. Then Captain Brazenhead, kneeling on one knee, raised the stained hand of Madame de Picpus to his lips and respectfully kissed it.

"Madame my consort," he said, "your tribulations are over. A horse stands here for your ladyship, when your ladyship will be pleased to make use of it."

Nicole, with one shamefaced glance at her tattered petticoat and wounded feet, arose. Her lord lifted her to the saddle, and, leading the bear by one hand and the horse by the other, took the way up the mountain.

Amazement sat upon the proud face of the young Lady Roesia, confusion upon that of her happy lover, when the Captain-Count presented all present to his lady the countess. He did it with a superb ease which is his highest praise. "Permit me, Madame Roesia, to make two noble ladies acquainted. To Madame de Picpus, my consort, I present the young Lady Roesia Des-Baux, descended from one of the holy kings of

Cologne—the most remarkable of them." Madame Roesia lifted her head, Madame Nicole hung hers, but the Captain-Count flicked up his moustachios in quick succession till they soared above his eyebrows like poplars on a river-bank.

To the young man Tristan, still barefooted, he used a somewhat severer tone. "Colleague," said he, "fellow journeyman upon the Parnassian uplands, your services to me have been many and great, but the honour of my consort demands full measure from you. And whereas in giving me news of her radiant appearance in a horde of hedge-thieves—in which company she, being the fairest of women, must needs have gleamed like a diamond in a midden—you did, without the fear of God, speak of her in common with all the women of that crew as 'drab'—a thing most hateful to me and lacerating to her honour —I now require you, bareheaded, to approach her ladyship and kiss her glorious knee, asking pardon upon your own pair for so detestable a fact. Come now, brother, play the man without ceasing to be poet."

A convulsive movement of the fair Nicole's betrayed her anxiety to cover her bruised knee before the ceremony might be done. But the alacrity of the young man prevented her. He kissed her uncovered knee, and upon his own implored her pardon, so justly, eloquently and well that Captain Salomon embraced him warmly and vowed they should commingle blood

before the sun set that day. And no doubt they did.

He then announced his settled intentions for the future. "Madame," he said to Dame Roesia Des-Baux, "I shall not conceal from your ladyship that my intentions with regard to yourself have varied from time to time. If I spare my blushes by not telling you of them, it is only, believe me, because they are now irrevocably fixed in your service. It is my intention to take you to your seigniory of Les-Baux, and it is my intention to hold your castle and town in your behalf; but it is not my intention to allow entry to the Viscount of Turenne, my late patron, nor to the reverend Bishop of Agde, my former patron—for reasons which it would not become me to discuss. I hold your good town for you, lady, upon two conditions. The first is that you lead to the altar this gifted young man, by whose aid I have recovered my wife and my enemy; and the second is that my lovely consort be made the mistress of your robes, and chief woman about your person."

These things being agreed to, the Count of Picpus sounded the advance; and when late that evening they halted in an abbey called Saint-Raimbaud-des-Mortadelles, and our hero held his fair Nicole in his arms, he proved to his own satisfaction and to mine that Boccaccio was perfectly right.

Of the ultimate fate of Simon and the brown bear; of Pym and his eye, and his Bishop of

Agde; of the three Counts of Picpus and the unheard-of contest between them; and lastly of Lambert Paradol of Castel Jaloux in Gascony, the only man to whom Captain Brazenhead ever bent the knee, the tale would be long, even if I knew all of it.

BOOK III

THE CAPTAIN OF KENT*

* This Saga, under the name of Brazenhead the Great, has already been published in a volume entitled "Fond Adventures," and is reproduced here, with the urbane agreement of Messrs. Macmillan, for the convenience of the Student.

CHAPTER I

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD WON A RECRUIT

PILGRIMAGE to Canterbury and Saint Thomas of Canterbury, which is in some a piety, in some a courteous act, for some salvation, for some a frolic, in others may very well be the covering of statecraft, of policy, of deep design. So it was with Captain Salomon Brazenhead in the month of May and year of our Lord God fourteen hundred and fifty. With him, "late of Burgundy, formerly of Milan," as we have seen—a lean man at this time of six feet two inches, of inordinate thirst, of two scars on his face, a notched forefinger, a majestic nose, of a long sword, two daggers, and a stolen horse, of experience in divers kinds of villainy, yet of simple tastes—with this free routier, I allow, pilgrimage was certainly a cloak of dissembling, while none the less a congenial and (as he would have been the first to admit) wholesome exercise. If he had served too long in Italy not to love conspiracy, he had not been to Compostella and Jerusalem for nothing. Indeed, he had skirted in his time too close to the rocks of Death not to respect those who (for honourable reasons) had

cast themselves upon them. Therefore he was by no means without devotion in seeking the Head of Thomas and the Golden Shrine, for all that he had business, and high business, on the road. For firstly, in this reign of King Henry the Sixth, he was a Duke of York's man, a White Rose man. Secondly, he was one of those who had sworn to have Jack Nape's head on a charger.* Lastly he was bosom friend of another Jack, whom he hoped to meet in Kent. I mean Jack Mend-all, Jack Cade, Jack Mortimer—call him as you will—that promising young man, who promised himself a kingdom and Englishmen a charter, who actually fought a battle on Blackheath, held London Bridge against the Mayor, Aldermen, and Citizens, and hanged Lord Say upon one of his own trees. From this practical statesman our Captain had received a roving commission to be his *Vox Clamantis;* he was to trumpet revolution along the Pilgrims' Way. This road was the most travelled in the realm; it led all men into Kent—Captain Cade's country; it could be safely used; with cockleshells and staves enough it could screen an army. Pilgrim only by the way, therefore, was Captain Salomon Brazenhead, sometime of Milan, late of Burgundy, now Deputy-Constable of All England, under Letters Patent of the Captain of Kent.

I have spoken of his leanness, of his inches, of his thirst. It must be added of him that he

* Jack Nape was Delapole, Duke of Suffolk, the best-hated man of his day, and no worse served than he deserved.

was plentifully forested with hair, which drooped like ivy from the pent of his brows, leaped fiercely up from his lip to meet the falling tide; gave him a forked beard; crept upwards from his chest to the light at his throat; had invaded his very ears, and made his nostrils good cover for dormice in the winter. I might sing of this, or of his eloquent eyes: I prefer a pæan on his nose. Captain Brazenhead had a nose—but an heroic nose, a trumpet, an ensign built on imperial lines; broad-rooted, full of gristle, ridged with sharp bone, abounding in callus, tapering exquisitely to a point, very flexible and quick. With this weapon of offence or defiance he could sneer you from manhood's portly presence to a line of shame, with it comb his moustachios. When he was deferential it kissed his lip; combative, it cocked his hat. It was a nose one could pat with some pretence; scratched, it was set on fire; you could see it smouldering in the dusk. Into the vexed debate, whether great noses are invariable with great men, I shall not enter. Captain Brazenhead was great, and he had a great nose; let this instance go to swell the argument. This fine, tall, hairy man rode directly to Winchester from Southampton, his port of debarkation, entered the city by the West Gate, and stabled his horse at The George, which was then the principal inn. This done, he sent the ostler for a gallon of beer, and in his absence inspected with great care all the animals tethered in the yard. It was his intention to make sure

of a good one for the morrow, seeing that his own—if a spavined makeshift levied from an Eastleigh smithy can so be called—did not please him at all. He chose a handsome round-barrelled roan, rising not more than seven, and did not trouble to change the furniture more than to add his pack to those already on the saddle. He was then quite ready to drink his liquor turn and turn about with the ostler and two Grey Friars whom he found in a sunny corner—for the Captain was a large-hearted man. He captivated whatever company he happened to be in; this was his weakness, and he knew it. So now, with scarcely a word said, he persuaded those two friars that they had not seen what they had watched with some interest a few minutes before: he convinced the ostler that the horse he now saw and admired was the very horse he had despised when he came stiffly into the yard. Admirable man! he set his steel bonnet at a rake over one eye, chewed a straw, and cocked his sword point to the angle of a wren's tail. These things nicely adjusted, his mind at ease, full of the adventurous sense of strange airs and hidden surprises waiting for him behind strange walls, he walked abroad into Chepe, intending to pay his devotions to the Shrine of Saint Swithin, that (by these means) a good ending might follow so good a beginning; for, as he had said more than once, honour is due to a dead gentleman from living gentlemen. "If I go," he would protest, "into such an one's good town

and bend not my knee in his audience-chamber, I shame my nobility by flouting his. So it is precisely when I visit a Cathedral city, whereover is set enshrined some ancient deceased man of God. That worthy wears a crown in Heaven which it becomes me to acknowledge whilst I am yet upon the earth. And so I do, by Cock!"

With these and other like reflections he passed by the Pilgrims' Gate, where the meaner sort of worshippers—pitiful, broken knaves, ambush men, sheep-stealers, old battered soldiers, witches, torn wives and drabs—stand at the shining bars, their hands thrust in towards the Golden Feretory, and whine their petitions to the good saint's dust, and entered by the west door, with much ceremony of bowing and dropping to the knee, and a very courtly sharing of his finger-load of holy water with a burgess's wife, who was quite as handsome as one of her condition had need to be. Within the church he paused to look about him, but not to admire the shrine, the fine painting, the gold work and lamp work with which it abounded. He knew churches well enough: business was business, that of Master Mortimer crying business, that of Captain Brazenhead fisherman's business. Rather, he cast a shrewd eye at the haunters of the nave, passing over the women, the apprentices, all the friars. He saw three or four likely blades playing with a dice-box in a corner, and gained one of them by a lucky throw. He picked up a Breton pedlar at his

prayers, also a shipman from Goole, who had been twice hanged for piracy and twice cut down alive—"Three's the number for you, Lucky Tom," he told him by way of encouragement. In the Chapel of the Sepulchre he found an old friend, Stephen Blackbush, of Aldermary Church, now in hiding for coin clipping, claimed him, insisted on having him, and got his way. All this was very well indeed, yet the captain sighed for more. "I have here so much mass," he told himself, "so much brawn; now Mortimer needs brain. This *rascaille* would as lieve be under the bed as in it any day, and not one of it worth a pinch of salt to the pudding we have in the pot. Give me a stripling of wit, kind Heaven, to out-balance all this dead meat." Scanning the company as he turned over these reflections and framed these prayers, he came plump upon the very thing—came, saw, conquered, as you are to learn.

This was a slim, tall, gracefully-made youth, very pretty, who in a pale oval face had a pair of hot, small, greenish eyes, a long nose, a little mouth like a rose-bud, and a sharp chin dimpled; who wore his brown hair smooth and cropped short, and had the shape and tender look of the God's self of love, as you or I might have seen the boy. This young man, whose name was Percival Perceforest, was a scholar in his way, well versed in the books of Ovid, the *De Remedio* and other like works; knowing a great part of the *Romaunt de la Rose* by rote, and also the Songs of

Horace. These he was accustomed to cite colloquially, as a priest his psalter. He would speak of the *Vitas hinnuleo*, the *Integer vitae*, or the *Solvitur*, where the clerk would have his *In Exitu Israel* or *Notus in Judaea*. Not that he had not these also pat upon the tongue: afterwards it came out that, bred for the Church, he was actually in minor orders. Now, with all these advantages of person and training, it is a very strange thing that he should have been found by Captain Brazenhead leaning against a pillar of the nave, crying upon the cuff of his jacket. Yet it was so. Round about him stood unwholesome, too-ready sympathisers, women of the town, harpies; hard-favoured, straddling, bold-browed hussies, whose gain is our loss.

A short-faced, plainish man stood there too, respectably dressed, who tried to cope, but failed to cope, with two things at once. To the women he was heard to say, "Begone, shameless baggages, tempt not the afflicted," which made them laugh and hit each other in their mirth. The weeper he urged with a "God help thee, youth, and expound thy misfortunes to me if thou canst not!" But the name of God caused the young man to blubber the more. Captain Brazenhead took a shorter way. He smartly touched his man on the shoulder, calling him his bawcock, his nip and frizzle, his eye and his minion; at the women he flung up his hands with a rush, as one starts a greyhound. "Off, detriments!" he cried tremendously; and they slunk or swaggered away

with very injurious but muttered expressions to the effect that they were not going to do for such an old piece what they actually were doing as they spoke. "Now, good Master Burgess," said the Captain to the respectable man (whom he had placed at once), "and now young Niobus," to the lad, "we will accommodate these waterworks, if it suit you. Follow me." He laid a hacked finger to his nose, and scowled upon the couple with so much hopeful mystery, such commanding confidence, such an air of give-and-take-and-be-damned, that follow him they did; the merchant as one who says: "Well, well, since your humour is so," and the other with subdued sniffs. But the merchant, as having a solid foundation upon this earth, trampled stoutly, with a smack of the shoes upon the pavement, while Percival Perceforest went a-tiptoe. It is proper to add that this latter was dressed in a tight jerkin of green velvet, rather soiled, frayed at the edges, wanting a button or two at the bosom; that he wore scarlet stockings, darned in places and not darned in other places; that his shoes were down at heel, the feather in his red cap broken-backed; that he looked rumpled but innocent, unfortunate rather than debauched, as if he had slept out for a night or two—which was precisely the fact.

The Captain, deep in the delights of mystery, conducted his initiates to the stone ledge which ran along the new chantry of Bishop Wykeham. Here he sat down, and courteously invited the

merchant to a place at his right hand. This being declined with a "Sir, I thank you"—"Two feet for ever!" said the Captain heartily, and nodded Percival Perceforest to the place at his left hand. Percival meekly took it. "Pretty lamb!" said this fatherly Captain, and put a hand on his shoulder.

Undoubtedly Captain Brazenhead had a notable manner; endearment and command coincided in his tones; he seemed to be pursuing his own generous way when really he was hunting yours. He succeeded with Percival to the point of marvel.

"Name, my suckling?" he asks, and is answered, "Percival Perceforest, sir."

"Could not be better, indeed. Your age, Percival?"

"Of nineteen years, sir." The Captain smacked his leg.

"I knew it; I was certain of it!" he cried with delight, then sobered for a moment to ask:

"Now, have you, Percival, in all your nineteen years of travail in this old round, ever let so much water from your eyes as on this day?"

"No, no, indeed, sir. There has been no such occasion," says Percival, and breaks out sobbing like a drawpipe. The Captain thumped him on the back. "No more o' this. Back to your kennel, tears! Down ramping waters, waste my cheeks no more! Madness of moons——"

Percival thought it right to explain. He looked up with all the proper pride of grief in his hot eyes.

"Sir," he said, "I would have you understand, if you please, that I am the most wretched young man in all England."

"Stuff!" says the merchant, testily; "windy talk!"

"By Cock, not at all," broke in the Captain, "but sound and biting truth, as I can tell. I know something of wretchedness, let me assure you, Scrivener"—the merchant started—"ah, and of English wretchedness, too, since I myself have seen the top of a handsome nobleman lying two yards away from his trunk, and his pious lady pondering which morsel she should first embrace —a pitiful sight, I hope. And in Lombardy, you must know, they sow the fields with men's head-pieces, and thereby breed dragons, as Cadman also did in the tillage and common fields about Thebes. Sir, sir, this lad is in an agony, if I have ever known agony. Now, I will lay a thousand marks to your ink-bottle that I can place a finger on the nut of his grief." The Captain spoke so heatedly that Percival was minded to soothe him.

"It is too deep-rooted, dear sir," he said.

"I prick deep," replied the Captain, and raised a finger. "Now mark me, boy. You, in the first delicious flush of manly love, have been torn from your bosom's queen."

"Oh, sir!" says Percival, gasping.

"And she is of high degree."

"Oh, sir!"

"And she is here in this city of Winton—and you have tramped in her steps—and slept under hedges, and in the skirts of brakes—and seen her —and by her been seen—and yet you cannot get at her—hey?"

"Oh, sir!" cried Percival, showing the whites of his eyes; "oh, sir, what magic do you use?" The Captain held out his hand for the other to kiss.

"My magic is the magic of that glowing old puddle of blood, my heart," says this triumphant man. "What difficulty had I? What does youth cry for? Why, youth again. But you tell me much more than such *a*, *b*, *c*. Your jacket" (he fingered the sleeve) "was good Genoa velvet once—and is not green her livery? The sun hath printed the badge in your cap and defies your busy fingers: do you bear arms in your own right?" He snapped his fingers. "You have played with your master's daughter, page-boy." Percival hung his head.

The Captain reassured him. "Oh, you have not gone too far. The velvet tells me another tale, my friend. The pile lies down along this line, and this line, and this line"—he drew his finger down Percival's back. "I think your master's staff has been at work here, therefore it was no case for the hemp-collar. And he sent you packing, I see. The white dust of

Wilts cries from those shoes; and here, as I live by bread, is some Hampshire hay to tell me where your bed was made last night." He pulled a long stalk from Percival's trunks and tasted it. "Whitchurch hay?" he asked.

Percival replied, "No, sir, Sombourn."

"Ah," says the captain, "I knew it was grown on the western side of the shire. My palate is out of order. Where does your master live, then?"

"At Bemerton, sir, in Wilts."

"I know the place." He considered it, gently rubbing his nose. "Good pasture lands about Avon. My Lord Moleyns owns the fee; but yours was not his badge. Would it be—no? Never old Touchett—Angry Touchett, as we called him in the old days."

"Sir Simon Touchett is his name, sir," says Percival. The Captain snapped his fingers and looked blandly at the merchant.

"Do I prick deep, Scrivener? Now then, to it once more. Angry Touchett had a pretty daughter, hey?"

"He hath four," says Percival. The merchant sniggered, and the Captain tapped his teeth, then jumped up with a snort, pulling Percival after him. "Boy," he cried, venturing his all on the main, "you love the second daughter of Angry Touchett."

He deserved to win. Percival opened his mouth, words failing him. The merchant said

"Tush!" and walked away; and Captain Brazenhead clasped the youth in his arms. You may be quite easy in your mind as to whether or no the whole story was poured out unreservedly.

True it was, according to his own tale, that Percival Perceforest, foot-page to Sir Simon Touchett, Knight, had loved his master's second daughter, Mistress Mawdleyn. Certain familiarities growing unawares, and growing dearer by use; certain innocent natural testimonies given and received; certain pledges scrupulously observed, were followed by certain unmistakable tokens. It was all very innocent and passably foolish—a boy-and-girl, kiss-in-the-dark, dream-o'-nights affair; but Angry Touchett had beaten his daughter and trounced his page. He had packed the girl off to her aunt, the Prioress of Ambresbury, and Percival to the devil, whom he conceived to be his natural father. Poor Percival, deplorably in earnest over his love-making, had skulked about the shaws and osier-brakes of Bemerton, trudged to Ambresbury over the downs, and learned the news there—all as much to the detriment of his spirits as of his trim adornment. The news being that the prioress would take her niece on pilgrimage to Canterbury, Percival, too, felt the call of Saint Thomas; he followed, taking the hospitalities that offered on the road. He saw the entry of Mawdleyn into Winchester with the Ambresbury retinue: saw her lodged in the stately Abbey of Hyde beyond the North Gate. He had seen and been seen,

and this mutual grief had been too many for him. He had opened the brimming sluices of his heart; he was tired, sick with longing, footsore, heartsore, desperate, young. Tears had done him good, but the Captain did more.

When he had the whole story out, "Now," said this intrepid man, "you and I, Percival, are in the fair way of a classic friendship, as I see very well. What! we have mingled tears"—this was true; "confidences have passed"—they had, but all one way; "we have looked each into the heart of the other! You shall be Patrocle to a new Achilles, Harmonium to Aristogeiton. Or let me stand for Theseus, Duke of Athens; you shall be that nobleman, whose name is on the tip of my tongue, who was followed by his loving attentions to the gates of Hell Town. Now, just as Achilles was kindled by the sparks beaten from the heart of Patrocle, whom he tenderly loved, so shall I most reasonably be by you, my Perceforest. If Theseus went to Hell after that other gentleman, I will go to Bemerton if needs be. But needs will not. Needs call otherwhere. What do you say to a likely manor in Kent, with the title of Lord of Parliament, cousin and councillor to a great king? You have a kingly name, for was not a Perceforest King of All England? Everybody knows it. You may carve out these rewards and have your little Mawdleyn under your arm all the while. Come. I see a part of the way, but I am plaguily a-thirst with all this tongue-work. Come, boy, let us drink. Leave

the rest to me. Counsel comes on the flood. But let us by no means omit our respects to the respectable Saint Swithin, lord of this place, though dead as a mutton-bone. Come, my gamebird, bend the knee with me."

CHAPTER II.

WILES OF CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD

They bent the knee together, the man of blood and the weeper, then rose up and went out of the great church. As they journeyed, the Captain was good enough to expound his philosophy of saints and ladies, whom he classed together as amiable emollients of our frail age, as so much ointment, necessary to us in early manhood, better, however, taken early, and always in moderation. Nearing the inn he became full of thought, and his face took on so portentous a cast of brooding melancholy that Percival dared not break in upon it. The Captain, as the result showed, had been thinking partly of beer, for he drank deeply and at once of this fount of solace, with both hands at the flagon. Percival sipped his beer delicately, without wetting more than the red of the lips; his little finger pointed to the sky as he lifted his jug. This was not lost upon the Captain, who said to himself: "It is easy to see that you are higher born than you suppose, my lambkin; so much the better for

Jack." But when he had again drunk copiously, thrown down the flagon for dogs to sniff at, and wrung out his beard, moustachios, and eye-brows, regardless of his birth he slapped his young friend on the thigh, saying, "I have it, gamepoult, I have it."

"What have you, sir?" asks Percival.

The Captain replied, "There is but one thing to have in the world, since you and I are one. I have your Mawdleyn like bird in net." He shut his two hands together to shape a cage; one of his thumbs was stuck up for the inmate. "She is in there, I tell you," he averred. "Do you see her?"

"Yes, sir," says Percival.

"You are a good lad," replied the Captain; and I'll tell you this for certain-sure; you, too, shall be there, billing on the same perch, in three shakes of a leg, if you follow me. Is this to your liking?"

Percival seized his friend's hand. "Oh, I will follow you to the world's end, dear sir!" he cried with fervour.

And the Captain: "You shall follow me no further than Kent at this present. Now, listen, and answer me. This Prioress of Ambresbury, what favour hath she? Is she a big lady, or a little mincing, can-I-venture kind of a lady? Is she of fine presence or mean? In a word, doth she favour your tun or your broomstick?"

"She is a fine woman, sir," replied Percival, "with a most notable shape."

"Aha!" says the Captain, "I feel a Turk. Now then, what sort of a train hath she? Many or few?"

"Sir, she is accompanied, as her due is, by two stirrup-boys, half a score men-at-arms, an esquire of the body, a seneschal, a confessor, and five tirewomen, to say nothing of Sister Guiscarda, who hath no teeth to speak of, or of Sister Petronilla, who loves me a little out of pity."

The Captain, musing, made a note of Sister Petronilla.

"Very sufficient indeed for an honourable gentlewoman," he said, "and very pleasing to God, I am sure. Now, if I twisted the neck of one of those stirrup-jacks, and put you into his place and breeches, who is the worse?"

Percival glowed in his skin. "No one would be the worse, sir," says he, "save, perchance, the boy whose neck you should be pleased to wring; and, oh, sir, many, many would be the better!"

"Let be then," said the Captain; "I will arrange it for you."

Percival sighed. "How shall I thank you, my noble benefactor?" he said earnestly.

The Captain put hands on his shoulders. "You shall thank me by your deeds, my lad. I know a youth of parts when I see him—a pale face that knows the look of letters, a thin hand that can curl about a penholder. You are exactly what I need. Don't suppose that you are not to work for your bliss. Not at all. You shall do a pretty work in the world before you are a moon

older. Now I am for the Abbey of Hyde. Have you any commands for me? A billet for the round eyes of Mawdleyn Touchett? A love-lock? Ah, you are shorn like a Burgundian, I see."

"Sir," says Percival, "I will write if I may."

"Write, write," his friend urged him. "I am glad you have the knack of that. Presently you shall be writing for the realm."

Percival, using his knee for desk, wrote in the inn-yard :—

"MY PRETTY LAMB,

"These words shall kiss thine eyes, letting thee know that I am near at hand, withal crying to be nearer. And so I shall be anon, as I am assured by the noblest friend ever young man had. Start not, colour not, be surprised at nothing thou shalt see or hear to-morrow. O my lovely love, my rose, my dear, kiss this paper where my heart is spilt.

"From thy true love,

"POOR PERCIVAL.

"To my Sweet Mistress Mawdleyn Touchett, by a very trusty hand."

"Read it over to me, boy," said Captain Brazenhead.

This Percival did, with some confusion of face.

"By the bones of Saint Jezebel," said his friend, "that is the prettiest letter but three I

have ever read of—ah, or caused to be written. Soon enough—that gate—you shall wriggle where that will go. Now help me out with my horse and stuff. I lodge at Hyde this night, and do you lie snug in the Strangers' Hall, my dear, and stay there till I send for you."

CHAPTER III

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD WAS HIMSELF RECRUITED

THE deeds of Captain Brazenhead from this point became swift and ruthless; they demand epic treatment wholly beyond my present means, and would be omitted, with a bare mention of the fact accomplished, were it not for one beautiful flaw in them, very characteristic of the man, which (although he had no notion of it then) entirely spoiled his own real design, to Percival Perceforest's incalculable benefit. Let me, therefore, say that the Captain rode (upon his stolen horse) into the stables of the Abbot of Hyde, and told a lay-brother, whom he found there, that he was to be a guest for that night. Dismounted, he stalked into the stables to see the animals. There was a fat cream-coloured Galician horse there, with a head-stall of red leather. He risked his all upon that.

"What!" he cried out, "is my gossip the Lady of Ambresbury abroad? Is that possible?"

"Her ladyship is here for one night, indeed, sir," says lay-brother Eupeptus.

The Captain faced him with terrible eyes. "And does she know, thinkest thou, bare-poll, that her dear Cambases is herded with common sumpter-beasts? By my head I will never believe it. Where are her people? Where are her two stirrup-boys, her half a score men-at-arms, her esquire of the body, her seneschal, her confessor, her five tirewomen, to say nothing of Sister Guiscarda, who has no teeth, or of Sister Petronilla, who loves me a little out of pity? Lord of battles, brother, answer me quick!"

"Sir," replied the trembling brother, "I believe they are in chapel at this hour; but the two lads are out in the meads, I am sure, birds'-nesting. I saw them go down this half-hour or more, and I'll swear to their present occupation, once they be there, by my lively hopes of Heaven."

Captain Brazenhead with a great air strode out of the courtyard; but instead of going into the Abbey he turned through a wicket-gate into the abbot's garden, skirted a yew hedge, found a hole in it, wormed himself through, crossed a kitchen plot, a herbary, a nuttery, climbed a wall by means of a fig-tree, and dropped ten feet into the meads. Then he took his way over the growing grass towards the river, which he saw coiling between banks of bright green, like a blue snake enlarging under the sun. The evening

was very fair, the sun behind the towers of Wolvesey, the rooks circling about the Nun's Walk. Larks soared and sang, a soft wind played over the meadows. The Captain, particularly, delighted in the cowslips, which, springing everywhere about his feet, appealed to his tenderest feelings, and caused him to skip like a lamb unweaned, lest he should unhappily tread on any nodding crown of them. "My fresh beauties! My dairy-delights!" cried he. "I would as soon trample my mother's grave as your wagging golden heads!" Prancing thus, full of the soft mood which opening adventure always brings to the truly adventurous, carolling and talking secrets to the flowers, he drew near the smooth-flowing, dimpled waters of Itchen, deep and dark just here. Right and left, up and down river he looked, first at the rising trout, next for bigger game. He clacked his tongue in his cheek at what he made out. "I am in luck's way this happy evening," he told himself. "I have divided the enemy." This was the case. To his left he saw a figure in dark clothes—or (to be exact) the lower half of a figure—busy in a clump of osiers; to his right another, very delicately pink in the declining sunlight, sitting on the bank of the river, naked arms clasping naked knees, chin a-top. "This is my game," said the Captain to himself. "I leave sedge-warblers to the other innocent. This one is a bather. He shall have a long swim, by my immortal part."

Captain Brazenhead, on his belly, crept warily

up a drain; and it had assuredly gone ill with the prioress's stirrup-boy had his stalking enemy not happened upon some very early forget-me-nots growing upon the north bank of his covert. This is one of those star-directed chances which may change the fates of empires. Seeing these flowers, "O patch of heaven's blue! O eyes of the deep hiding-place of my God!" breathed the prone, delighted Captain Brazenhead. "O colour of sacred hope, what blissful fortune drew my sight to thine?" He picked two or three of the starry flowers, and peered over the drain, as he did so, at the unconscious youth, who, with his knees clasped between his hands, still looked at the water. Said the Captain in his thought, "My lad, these azure blossoms have saved thy virgin life. Thank the Maker of all flowers!" So said, he sprang suddenly upon him from behind, as a man will throw himself upon a great fish in a shallow. The boy, smothered under fold upon fold of Captain, could neither move nor cry out. One great knee was over his mouth, another pressed the pit of his stomach; his toes were pricked by a fierce beard. The Captain at leisure reached over for his captive's shirt, and tore it into three long strips over his head. With one of these he securely bound the prisoner's ankles. Turning him over, he next tied his hands behind his back. Lastly, he wound up his mouth with three or four thicknesses of calico; then carried him off and laid him snugly in the drain, which was very nearly dry. He

did not forget to choose a place for him close to the patch of early forget-me-nots. "There, my chicken," he said kindly. "Your eyes shall be gladdened by the sight of the innocent saviours of your life. Look upon these little blue beauties, and thank God night and morning for one of the fairest sights His world can offer you." So said, he picked up the discarded clothes and ran as fast as he could towards the Abbey.

He broke through gates and doors, raced down passages, crossed the Little Cloister, and jostled a way for himself between the crowd of servants at the lower end of the refectory. The monks were at supper under the direction of the prior, who sat at the high table. The Lord Abbot, no doubt, was entertaining guests in his parlour; was therefore more remote from approach. It would be necessary for the Captain to roar if he wished (as he did wish) to be heard in there; and yet his sense of fitness told him that he should not bewail outrageously so slight a misfortune as he had been able to procure. "The noise I shall have to make," he had said to himself, reasoning as he ran, "if I am to penetrate the walls of the abbot's parlour, would be extravagant for the death of a prelate. Tush! and I am to waste it upon a thin little boy not even drowned in truth. But what else can I do to serve my friend Perceforest?"

Even as he said the words, being within the doors of the refectory, he began a wail which might well wake the dead. Holding on high

the limp testimony of his news, he poured the whole of his magnificent natural organ into gusts and volleys of woe towards the rafters. *Tuba mirum spargens sonum!* "Oh, too much dule to be borne! Oh, misery of men! Hapless, hapless Narcissus! Hylas, early cut off! Out and alas! *Mes très chers frères*, look upon these weeds!" It was as if the Seven Vials had been loosed, as if the Archangel were sounding the Last Trump, and all the unhappy dead voicing their despair. "*O lasso! Oimè! O troppo, troppo dolore!*" pursued the Captain, intoxicated with his fancy, and breaking easily into the Italian. The monks and their guests were all on foot, the servants ran about, the dogs came out from under the tables and howled at the howling herald. The Reverend Prior whipped his napkin from his neck (lest he should strangle) and swallowed a toast before the time. A picture of tragic woe, the Captain stood before him exhibiting in one hand a pair of murrey breeches and jerkin of leather; in the other a stout shoe, two worsted stockings, and what remained of a shirt.

"Look at these tokens, Reverend Father," says the Captain, "and shudder with me."

"Who are you?" asks the prior, blowing out his lips.

The Captain was ready for that. "I am Mallecho, the Sorrowful Sprite, the Dark Herald, Testadirame," he announced in bodeful accents.

"And why under Heaven do you show

me your old clothes?" the prior asked him testily.

The Captain, with sobs, enlarged upon the question. Would to God, he cried out, that they had been his! Alas! they had covered a younger, more blossoming body than his old skin could hold. The nymphs, he went on to say, had the beauteous owner of these weeds; Itchen's blue wave rolled over him, fishes explored his armpits, eels and other serpents wreathed his legs.

"This man," said the Reverend Prior, "is undoubtedly mad. Let the Almoner be sent for, the Infirmarer, and the Exorciser——"

But at that moment a monk, running in from a door in the panel, knelt before the prior, a messenger from the Lord Abbot, to know what this monstrous commotion could be about.

It was wonderful to see the change in Captain Brazenhead. The usher of woe no more, there stood erect as keen a man of affairs as ever you saw in your life.

"Your pardon, my reverend brothers, I had taken this good father for your Lord Abbot. Conduct me, brother, to his Grace. Unless I gravely mistake, I have sad news for his most cherished guest."

"Do you mean——" the prior began to ask.

Captain Brazenhead laid a finger to his mouth. "I do mean——" he began to answer.

"Take him with you, Brother Harmonius," said the prior; so the Captain with his tokens was led away to the abbot's parlour.

In this very stately apartment of black oak and silver sconces and a statue of the Blessed Virgin, he saw all that he wanted. The Lord Abbot was there, a shaggy-browed, portly man, enthroned. On his right hand sat the Prioress of Ambresbury, majestic, ox-eyed, slow-moving, with the remains of beauty carefully husbanded; next to her a yellow old nun with a few teeth; next to her again the undoubted Mawdleyn Touchett of Percival Perceforest's handling, a fine die-away girl, with a creamy skin, bountiful shape by no means concealed in a dress of white cloth, and a pair of brimming brown eyes, which, his experience told him, would go through a diaphragm quicker than a knife through butter. Upon her farther side was another nun, of mild repining countenance, whose head mostly inclined to one side, and who as she talked drew the breath inwards. This must be Sister Petronilla, who loved Percival a little. Other guests there were, of whom this history has nothing to report. Supper was over: the abbot dallied with a sop in wine, the prioress with a silver toothpick; Mawdleyn Touchett, who seemed in a melting mood, rather tumbled and very tired, played with her fingers in her lap. A couple of minstrels half-kneeled on the floor, and strummed their strings to deaf ears. Captain Brazenhead was a diversion, a healthy gale in a close garden; the singers stopped of their own accord in the middle of an heroic couplet, telling how—

"Sire Simone de Rochefort
N'i porta pas banière a tort,"

and Captain Brazenhead came lightly to the point.

"By your leave, my Lord Abbot," he said, then turned nobly to the Prioress of Ambresbury. "Madame, I bring this sorrowful testimony of the too early demise of one of your servants. A young boy, madame, whose privilege and hope it was to serve by your foot, seeking the solace of the water, has found eternal solace in the bosom of Our Lady (whom let us bless for ever!). I found these clothes by the water, madame; the tender body I found not."

The prioress removed the toothpick, as she said, "I recognise the colour of my livery, sir, but do not call to mind the wearer. It may be very true what you tell me."

"It is most woundily true, madame," says the Captain with a glimpse at Mawdleyn's brown eyes.

"I do not doubt you, sir," returned the prioress; "but I suppose I can find boys enough in Winchester. Meantime, I am very much obliged to you for your labours."

"Madame," says the Captain, "my labours, as you are pleased to call what I protest to be delights, are but begun, if (as I assume) your ladyship needs a new stirrup-boy. I hope I know what is due from a man of my degree to a lady of yours. We chevaliers, madame, are sworn to the succour of ladies; and I should never dare look again

into the face of my friend the Duke of Milan (who dubbed me knight) if I were false to that oath. Madame, I found the husk, let me find a kernel. I found the poor weeds, let me find the sprouting bud."

"I confess that I do not altogether understand your desires," said the prioress, with some hesitation; "but if the Duke's Grace of Milan——"

"Yes, yes," put in the abbot, "if the Duke's Grace of Milan——"

"Would to God, dear madame," cried the Captain, with real feeling; "would to God, my Lord Abbot, I could supply you with the kind of lads that flower in my good friend's court! Hey, the bloom, the glitter, the Cupid's limbs of these dexterous youths! They will tie you a shoe, pommel you a cushion; they will trim you a wimple, swing you to a horse, dance, sing, cap verses, tell tales like young gods at play of an evening. I cannot, in this homely land, perform the impossible, alack! but I can get you a very handsome youngster of my own retinue, and warrant him no lick-pot neither—if that will serve your ladyship's turn."

This was a delicate moment, if you please, for the Captain. Directly he had offered, he knew that he had offered too much and too soon; but there was no withdrawing. The abbot spoke first, leaning back in his chair; plainly he was weary of the thing.

"This appears to be a business for my sister

of Ambresbury to consider more with her seneschal than with her host. Yet the gentleman's pains merit some courtesy at our hands. Sir," he said to the Captain, "a cup of wine with you."

"My Lord," said Captain Brazenhead, "there spoke a prelate."

The wine was brought. Captain Brazenhead drank deep. After that he began to talk, and the minstrels' office was at an end. He spoke first of his travels in remote and marvellous parts of the world—of the desert between the Church of Saint Catherine and Jerusalem; of the Dry Tree; and of how roses first came into the world. The city of Calamye and its lamentable law of marriage engaged him next; also the evil custom of the Isle of Lamary, and concerning the palace of the King of the Isles of Java. He told of trees that bear meal, honey, wine, and venom; of the herb Edelfla, which is said to resemble a woman; of the realms of Tharse; of the Devil's head in the Valley Perilous; and of the pismires and their hills of gold. By a transition as easy as it was abrupt, he passed to Natural Science, in which he showed himself learned without pedantry. He spoke of the nine eyes of the lamprey, and reasoned boldly for the common opinion of the ostrich, which conceives that it digesteth iron. This, he said, he had himself proved, though he must be excused from telling them how. I wish you could have heard him upon the vexed question of whether hares are indeed hermaphrodites;

he was so adroit in handling, fertile in parallels, discreet, subtle, provocative of thought. And he carried his hearers with him. Not so, however, in the matter of mandrakes, to whom he denied the virtue of shrieking when pulled by night. Of this the Prioress of Ambresbury was positive; equally constant was the Abbot of Hyde in the assertion that they have thighs. The Captain laughed off his obstinacy.

He spoke next of perils, painted in battle-pieces with a broad brush as he went. He took his hearers with him to sunny foreign courts, to Venice, to Rimini, to Florence, back again to his dear Milan, and to three hundred Anabaptists whom he confessed to slaying there. They beheld him head a sortie at the siege of Rhodes. When the Barbary corsairs chained him naked to a galley they sat still, crisping their hands, until he picked up with his toes the half of a file; then while his escape was in the framing, while the file (wetted with spittle) ground through the hot, dense nights, ah, how they held their breath! He whirled them off with him into the Low Countries, and bade them wait while he cut the dykes and flooded a whole country-side. He burned the Pucelle of Orleans before their dilating eyes, and owned with natural blushes that it was himself (for reasons then found good) so nearly broke the marriage-treaty between King Harry's Grace and the daughter of King René of Anjou. In a word, by these his accounts of wide experiences, of patient, curious research, of gestes and feats of

arms, rapidly delivered, copiously illustrated, and exceedingly untrue, he had his auditory between his finger and thumb; and not even a little misadventure with Mawdleyn midway of his oration could throw him off his balance. The fact is, the Captain greatly admired this fine girl, and paid her the tribute of his looks and speech a little more than he need, or was prudent. This, while it escaped the prioress, by no means escaped the vigilance of the sour old nun who sat at her left hand, and who deliberately brought up the girl's blue riding-cloak from the back of her chair, and pulled the hood over her head so as to cover her eyes. Thus hooded like a hawk the poor child remained; yet, while the Captain not so much as paused in his discourse at the cruel act, he was careful to see the gentler nun on the other side wince at it, and (good husbandman!) made that serve his turn, as you will discover. The end of all was that he won over the Prioress of Ambresbury, who, on rising from the table, begged his company for a further private conversation. By this time she had been led to believe that Captain Brazenhead had nearly lost his life in the effort to save her stirrup-boy's, that he had provided interment at his own charges, and written gentlemanly letters (enclosing a sum of money) to the parents. Such are the effects of the art of suggestion in rapid narrative.

At the going out, which was done with great ceremony of ushers, a chaplain and waiting women, the gentle nun fluttered near Captain

Brazenhead, wistful, and not daring to speak. The Captain encouraged her with the sort of eye that takes you more than half-way.

"Oh, sir," said this palpitating creature, "oh, sir, forgive my sister Guiscarda. She hath our charge greatly on her conscience."

"Dear madame," replied the Captain, soothingly, "say no more. She hath a fine heart, I am sure, and a lofty, great soul."

"She is too severe," said the good nun. "Gentleness may lead where harsh dealing may never, never drive." Captain Brazenhead took her hand and whispered over it:

"You share the qualities of the blessed angels, dear madame," he said. "Be now an angel indeed, a pious messenger. Hist! come close. You are a friend of our fair prisoner. You are, I know it; say no more."

The nun quailed to hear him.

"I love the dear child——"

"You do! And she loves—and she is loved—and she suffers—we suffer—they suffer—ha!"

"Oh, sir——"

"You have a red heart, madame. Quick, quick! Take this writing—'tis for her, a balsam for a bruised little heart. Hearts go bleeding; staunch the wound. Deliver it as you can, while I hold the old lady. I dare no more. Oh, sacred bond between you and me!"

He thrust into Sister Petronilla's trembling hand Percival Perceforest's love-letter. Before she could protest or implore he was gone—had

stepped after the prioress's people, and was in the thick of new oratory. Here I cannot ask you to follow him, but from what you know of his powers already displayed, you must judge the end of the adventure. He enlisted Master Perceforest, in the name of his sister's son, Piers Thrustwood (you mark the disguise), into the place and breeches of the youth who lay gagged and naked in a ditch in Winchester Meads, hard by a clump of early forget-me-nots. By this time corroborative testimony had been brought home by the second stirrup-boy, the birds'-nester.

That night Mawdleyn Touchett wrote as follows:

"O heart! S(ister) P(etronilla) delivered me your paper after supper. Now it is, you know where, well kissed. I would I had you there. They pulled my hood over my face because your soldier looked at me. I saw your face the better. *I will not see you to-morrow*, as you bid me; and yet, O, shall I not see you?

"Good-night, good-night, good-night!

"Your pledged,

"MAWDLEYN."

Outside this she dared to write, unable to resist the look of the words, "to my bosom's lord, P. P., give this, M. T. dardant desyr," and coaxed Sister Petronilla into delivering it to the Captain.

That same night Captain Brazenhead lay on his back upon the abbot's good flock; Percival moaned in his half-slumber, and rolled upon the beaten floor of the Common Hall; and Sister Petronilla, having Mawdleyn's happy cheek against her bosom, tried to believe herself justified by faith, not works.

CHAPTER IV

HOW PERCIVAL PROSPERED AND THE CAPTAIN FELT JUSTIFIED

"THE humble supplication of Lancelot Corbet, citizen and scrivener of London; Richard Smith, mariner, of the county of the town of Kingston-upon-Hull; of Gundrith, his wife, native of Norroway; and of Giles Cruttenden, of Mereworth, in the county of Kent, yeoman," was presented in the morning early to the "Reverend Mother, their Good Ladyship, the Prioress of Ambresbury"; and was to the effect that her orators, devoutly disposed by motions of their spiritual parts in no wise to be mistaken, were bounden upon the pilgrimage of Saint Thomas; but because of the disturbed state of the road, owing to these unhappy times of discord and the far purposes of Almighty God (not to be discerned by men alone), they went in peril of their lives and substance, "being but poor folk, unfriended of any." Their prayer was that they might be allowed to join the prioress, and be friends of her friends, foes of her foes; whereby they could not doubt but that Saint Thomas

would be favourable to them, and the lady profit by the added prayers of very grateful persons. Also her petitioners, as in duty bound, would ever pray.

The prioress was inclined to admit these honest people to her company; but Captain Brazenhead, who enjoyed some authority with her, said: "Pass the mariner and his (apparently) heathen wife, pass Cruttenden; but leave me to deal with Corbet the Scrivener, for I know him of old for a short-faced, snarling rogue."

It was true that Captain Brazenhead knew him for his acquaintance of yesterday in the Church of Saint Swithin. When, therefore, the short-faced man came prancing towards the gates of Hyde, cloaked, strapped, and well-embaled, the Captain met him with a short, "Ha, Scrivener, dismount. None enter here."

"By your leave, sir," says the Scrivener.

"You have no leave of mine," said the Captain, in reply; "therefore, come down, or I give you number three." He touched his pommel.

When the Scrivener, after multitudinous unstrappings, was on firm ground, Captain Brazenhead put on a very wise face, and said: "A word will be enough in your ear. We carry with us a person of consequence. You love Y——k."

The Scrivener went as white as the favoured rose.

"Who—what—how!"

"Precisely," replied the Captain; "you

answer yourself. Say no more; finger on lip; eyes on the ground; ears wide—pass in." The Scrivener went slowly in. Captain Brazenhead, his luck still holding, had spoken wiselier than he knew.

At this point you may see, if you will, Percival Perceforest demurely habited in the murrey jacket and breeches, the worsted stockings, greasy cap, and shoes of the prioress's stirrup-boy; you may guess what glint lay behind Mawdleyn Touchett's dewy eyes, with what clouded white and opening red she flushed and paled as each moment of a wondrous day brought up its alarms, to melt them suddenly in rewards; how the heart of Sister Petronilla (thick in the plot) played postman at her ribs; how greatly Captain Brazenhead behaved, flourishing the party forward out of Hants, how often his cap was in his hand to the Prioress of Ambresbury, how often her ear at his tongue's command. I cannot stay longer in Winton, or I would tell you myself. It shall suffice to say that Percival pleased. The prioress liked handsome persons about her; Percival, whose nerves made him vivid, looked very handsome in his meekness, eagerness-on-the-leash, and high colours. They had not gone very far before a chance outburst of his in the French tongue—he sang from a full heart, and quite unconsciously—gave his mistress a hint that, if the new lad was deficient in stable knowledge, he had other lore.

This happened when they were no farther on their way than the two miles of deep descent and

gentle rise which bring you to Headborne Worthy and its miraculous Rood, which the curious may still see, beaten, dumb, blind, but portentous, in the sacristy of that weathered shrine—a maimed Titan guarded by heroes. Sister Guiscarda had vowed a candle to this image should she be delivered from the face-ache of the previous day. She was delivered. Captain Brazenhead judged it wise to put a prayer out to usury. Mawdleyn, in this heyday of her heart, must needs praise the kindly saints. But the prioress sat on her saddle, and Percival, seeing his true love depart, took such joy in her mere carriage of the head, had such exuberant savour of the coming day, the coming days, the coming week, which he should spend in her fragrant company, that as he loitered, dreaming by the gate, he forgot himself and began to sing:

"Si cum j'oi la Rose aprochée,
Un poi la trovai engroissée,
Et vi qu'ele iere plus creüe
Que ge ne l'avoie veüe . . ."

The prioress pricked up her ears, but let Percival's voice go wandering on; then she said, "Come hither, Piers."

Percival started, blushed, but obeyed.

"Dost thou know what thou singest there?"

"Yes, please you, my lady; I sang the *Romaunt ae la Rose.*"

"Thou hast that piece?"

"I had all of it by heart upon a time, my lady; but have lost the greater part."

"Begin, if you please," said the prioress; so Percival began:

"Maintes gens dient que en songes . . ."

and had got as far as:

"Ou vintiesme an de mon aage,"

when the pilgrims came out of church, and a chance shot from Mawdleyn's eyes threw him out. He helped his beloved to the saddle, he shored up Sister Guiscarda on hers; but the prioress did not budge. When the confusion of horses was over, she asked her stirrup-boy aloud, whether he could continue this or any other lay?

"Madame, if it please you," said Percival, "I know the *Romaunt* very well; and I know the tale of the *Twelve Peers and Ganelon*, and of *Gallien le Rhetoré* (which is very short), and also that of *Le Jouvencel*, a didactic piece. Moreover, I know that story of *The Proud Lady in Amours*, which they call 'Blanchardyn,' and also *Isofere the Hardy*, and *The Lays of Marie de France*. There are songs in *The Ladies' Orchard*, which I can sing if you wish for them; and another in the Italian tongue which begins 'In the greenwood I found a shepherdess;' and certain *Triumphs of Petrarch*, and very pleasant sonnets which he wrote to the dear name and fame of Madame Laura, his mistress—any of these I can sing, whichever the company desire——"

"Ah!" cried the prioress, with a little gasp; "and the airs of these divine inventions, Piers—where gat you these?"

"Madame," replied he, blushing a little; "some of the airs were devised by me for the lute, some in plain song, and some in prick-song, for three or four voices; and some, not yet considered, I hope to achieve as I go."

"I ask you now," said the Captain, with huge delight; "is this a prodigy I have procreated or not?" It came natural to him to suppose himself the father of such a boy; and, after all, a nephew is not far removed.

The prioress was observing the speaker with gravity. Without taking note of Captain Brazenhead's vaunt, she quietly bade him go on where he had left off. The obedient lad once more put his hands behind his back, threw up his chin, and rippled out his French syllables about love, with his own love's heart beating a little above his own, and her brown eyes burning through the top of his head. She lent him eloquence; he sang clear and loud:

"Or veil cet songe rimaier
Por vos cuers plus fere esgaier
Qu'amors le me prie et commande. . . ."

at which last words, if the prioress had been wary, she could not have failed to see deep call unto deep. For Mawdleyn dropped her eyes, and Percival's travelled as high as her chin and stayed there. Two others saw as much as they should, namely, Captain Brazenhead, who thought it too good to last, and Master Smith, the mariner, who studied Percival's nose.

"Very pretty," said the Captain to himself, "but full of jeopardy." He broke in to address the prioress. "Madame," he said, "the sun warns me that we should proceed. Let us have my nephew's minstrelsy on the way by all means; but let the ground-bass be our horses' hoofs. We have a far road to Alton Town."

"This swordsman is right, my lady," said Corbet the Scrivener. "Let her ladyship's boy sing as he walks by your ladyship's foot."

"I could have sworn by Saint John that there was but one long nose in a pretty face in all this world," the shipman thought to himself. "And whom have we here?" quoth he.

The prioress took up the Scrivener. "My boy shall walk by my foot no farther than Alresford," she said with decision. "Young man," she turned to Percival, "you are out of your station, I can see. I will look to your advancement, if I love music."

"I thank your ladyship," says Percival; and Captain Brazenhead glossed that text with, "Certainly, I did my friend Jack a good turn when I won this throstle-cock. 'Tis a little marvel of science."

Now, the prioress would have had the *Romaunt of the Rose* in its entirety, though it should have lasted her (as it would) to her first view of the golden angel on Bell Harry. But this was not to be. By the time Percival had failed at the three-hundred-and-fiftieth line, the company was feverish for something which they might possibly

understand. I have spoken somewhat of the shipman who travelled with them, who came from Kingston-upon-Hull, called himself Richard Smith, and thought he knew Percival's nose. This was a bright-eyed, confident, chin-in-the-air kind of fellow, a golden-bearded, apple-coloured man, with a thin wife, very much (and too much) at his devotion, who studied the singing-boy sideways the whole time of his singing, watched his feet, his fine long hands, his sharp little chin, his small mouth, his hot little eyes, his fine long nose. He smacked his forehead and talked to himself, he explored the sky, the downs, the birds in the trees, but all to no purpose; he could not put a name to his memories. When Percival faltered, tried back, caught at a line ahead, and could not work up to it, this mariner broke in with a laugh.

"Belay, there, shipmate, give over your lead," quoth he; "you cannot bottom it. And I, dear Lord, have been in shoal water these three hours. By Blackbeard and Whitebeard, you know a mort of French words, and all of them different, it seemeth. Now, I would like to know of you, where gat you all those words? For you and I, little master, are not strangers."

As Percival looked startled at him, "By my head and heart, shipman," said Captain Brazenhead, "you have spoilt a pretty dream I was in. For to hear those fair words took me back to the sack of Orleans, where I lay lapped in plenty, and learned that tongue out of as choice a mouth as your wife hath. I have a mind to set my nephew

another task. What, Piers, what gamebird, have at you in Tuscan then!"

"Nay, sir," said the prioress, "let Piers alone. He has said enough for his turn."

"Is this young man your nephew, soldier?" asked the shipman.

Captain Brazenhead twisted his moustachios. "I would like to see the older man who denies it," he said, with a glitter in his eye.

The Scrivener, who feared bloodshed more than he feared Captain Brazenhead, intervened with a hasty suggestion, that he supposed the friend of the Duke of Milan might have as many nephews as he chose. "Ah," said the shipman darkly, "and nieces—like the Pope—you would say!" The Captain half drew his sword, but here the prioress stayed him with a look. A tale from the Scrivener held them as far as their lodging at Alresford on the hill.

CHAPTER V

HOW PERCIVAL WAS BOLD AND THE CAPTAIN BOLD

In the morning very early Percival Perceforest rose from his bed of straw in the stables, and busied himself with the horses' provand, singing softly as he worked—

"Now, Winter, go away,
And hide thy white array,"
Gratiâ Magdalenæ—

while his bed-fellow, the true stirrup-groom, gibed as he lay. Yesterday and yesternight had wrought wonders with the young man. He had a clear colour, his eyes shone, courage tingled in his fists. So much was this the state of his case that within a short half-hour of his rising he was pommelling that other groom, that other him again, as if all his future bliss were staked upon it. Battle was cried and delivered in the inn-yard, where Captain Brazenhead, his first flagon on his knee, sunned himself and enjoyed the game. Discretion was no part of that great man's equipment, boldness was all. "Stick in your right, Piers,—at him again! Now, now, now,

land him on the ear! Ah, foul blow! Swing round, boy—paff! now let drive——" Such were his vociferous comments on the scuffling youths. In less time than it has taken me to write this exordium Percival had a black eye, his colleague a mouthful of red teeth, many of which he was forced to discard. The air was thick with eyes and alarms; Mawdleyn Touchett strained in anguish from an upper window, provocatively dishevelled; Sister Petronilla watched through a chink in the shutter; the prioress in awful majesty descended to the yard, and required the truth. The real stirrup-boy, whose name was Jenkin, said, "This fellow called me a black liar"; snorting yet, Percival added, "and that art thou, my man." The truth being demanded, Captain Brazenhead struck in with many a courtly bow.

"Dear reverend madam," he said, "now we may well discern the truth of the vulgar saw, *Blood will out!* I speak not of this knave's blood, which is a very disgustful topic, not to be entered on so early in the day; but rather of that secret fount of our life which we call a man's *Blood:* meaning his strain—that essence, that quick ichor, that imparted jet, that spring, that far-descended well, which wanders from the Navel of the world down the Protuberance of Time, searching for (but when to find?) the Sea of Eternity. In truth, reverend madam, my nephew is something lowly placed in your service. For look now, had he been where Nature, that wise parent, had designed, he had had a dagger in his girdle to

insinuate under that other's girdle—ah, he had carried a sword! Then there had been no rough-and-tumble of fisticuffs, madam; no, but a slick-out and a slick-in, and a dead knave to bury. I hope I make my meaning plain. This lout angered my nephew as he was loyally (O likeness to Apollo!) serving Queen Admeta—dear madam, forgive an old latinist, incorrigible dog. My nephew says, 'You lie, knave!' meaning that what he dared to say of your ladyship was far from the truth—no less. My nephew ups and smacks him on the chops; head down, fists in the air, lick-pot comes on to his doom. One, two—one, two—my nephew lands him in the teeth; up again! down again! Sola! My nephew, at the cost of an eye, madam, vindicates his own lineage and his dear mistress's nobility; at the cost of one eye, observe. I hope I explain myself, dear reverend madam." Thus the Captain, while Percival tried to temper his breath, and Jenkin tested tooth after tooth.

The prioress looked gravely from one to another—regardless alike of her niece at the upper window and her household at the gate—at the engaging candour of Captain Brazenhead, whose explanatory hands still showed her their palms, at Percival's flushed cheeks and heaving chest, at Jenkin's pre-occupation with the ruin of his teeth. Mostly she looked at Captain Brazenhead, not because she liked him the best; for Percival was handsome, and master of the *Romaunt de la Rose*, whereas the Captain was

neither; no, but because he was her chief justification for what she was about to do. The Captain put his lineage very high, assumed lightly certain privileges which she held dear. If this personable, scholarly youth were the Captain's nephew—and who proposed to deny it?—then she was acting Admetus to Apollo, indeed. Piers had played a gentleman's part without a gentleman's weapons. He had a soft voice, and knew the *Romaunt de la Rose*. She must reward Piers, and she did.

"Piers," she said, "go into the house and have your eye dressed. Sister Petronilla will see to it. You say that you have acted rightly: I am sure I hope so. I will talk to you presently. As for you, Jenkin, I shall leave you to the care of Dan Costard"—Dan Costard was the prioress's chaplain, a fine disciplinarian—"but I hope that before you see him you will clean yourself. Captain Brazenhead, I am very much obliged to you for your timely interposition."

The Captain bowed. He held the lady in conversation for some half an hour, while Perciva was having his eye dressed—not by Sister Petronilla. His own lineage, and by implication Percival's, lent him topics. It was exceedingly distinguished. Assurbanipal, King of Syria, by his illicit union with Mantagyra, daughter of the Prince of the Kurds, was the root of his title. Those two valiant knights-errant, Sir Partenopex of Blois and Sir Tyrant the White, figured later on, about the time of King Uther Pendragon

(inextinguishable enemy of the Brazenheads); and Duke Regnier of Genoa, one of the twelve Peers of Charlemagne, was a collateral. Magnificent as this pedigree was, the Captain frankly admitted the irregularity of the tie which bound the exalted pair from whom it sprang; but attributed it to the loose state of manners prevailing in their times—the darkness all over the moral state, and the inexplicably tardy approach of the Christian dispensation.

"All this," said he, "I know as well as your ladyship, and as heartily deplore it. But who are we to judge the practices of ancient kings? My ancestor of Syria, burthened with many lawful wives (another deplorable custom of his age), was hard pressed, what with his domestic and politic engagements. There may not have been a priest handy in Kurdistan at the time he fell on loving Madame Mantagyra—it is probable that there was not. And it would ill become me or my nephew Thrustwood to impeach an union of hearts, of whose passionate commingling we ourselves are the late, pale flowers. With all this," he concluded, "I vex your ladyship's good ears, that your ladyship may see how ill-suited my nephew must be in a stable jacket, reduced to double his two fists into cudgels for lack of a fine sword to grip. I make bold to add: Advance my nephew, you do honour to the imperial seed of Assurbanipal and the noble (if erring) Mantagyra!"

The prioress, who appeared to be very much

impressed with this long recital, after thanking Captain Brazenhead, returned thoughtfully to the house, but not in time to see the balm which Mawdleyn Touchett was applying to the eye of the Syrian imp.

In this simple manner Percival Perceforest was advanced from stirrup-groom to secretary, although he could lend no more testimony than a fine colour to his kinsman's account of his ancestry. This, however, he lent liberally, with a modesty so becoming that the prioress gave him a chain of fine gold for his neck. Alresford furnished forth a suit of brown velvet; he now rode the horse which formerly he had curried, and had the boy in his service with whose teeth he had littered the yard. Thus the Fortunate Gods seemed to favour him, or rather his fistic ability. His place was now by the side of his mistress, between her and Mawdleyn Touchett.

The day was still young when they left the town, and had need to be, for they were to reach Waverley that night, and hoped to pass the heat of noon at Alton. Again, as they went, they began with minstrelsy, which Percival (out of a full heart) could pour in a flood. And now the lad was more daring than he had been.

"If it do not displease your ladyship," he said, "I shall sing you a ballad of my own making, which is in honour of Saint Mary Magdalene, my patroness," he added with a thankful, tell-tale sigh.

Mawdleyn Touchett, knowing that song of

old, looked scared; Sister Petronilla turned up her eyes, and Captain Brazenhead thought it prudent to change the conversation.

"The conversion which I wrought by means of that blissful Saint is very dear to my mind," he began. "The Bashaw Korouc, I remember, met me in the rocky defiles above Ascalon——"

But the prioress said, "Sing, Piers, of Saint Mary Magdalène," so Percival thrust up his chin and sang:

"Now, Winter, go away,
And hide thy white array,
Gratiâ Magdalenae!
Thy pelt is all too rude
To drape her melting mood—
Dominae Laus amoenae!

"Come April, thou, with showers,
Bring daffodils, wind-flowers,
Gratiâ Magdalenae;
Bring in the young lamb's bleat,
Soft rain, and gentle heat,
Dominae Laus amoenae!

"Let me go clothed in wet,
Tears be my carcanet,
Gratiâ Magdalenae;
Silver my extern part,
Deep red about my heart,
Dominae Laus amoenae!

"Lady of sweet unrest,
Should I not love her best,
Gratiâ Magdalenae?
Unquiet go I, unkist,
Her starvéd rhapsodist,
Dominae Laus amoenae!"

"Thus women sing of women, but not men of women," said Smith the mariner to his wife. "Here we have for certain old Brazentop's *mye*."

"What hast thou to do with that since I am with thee, sweetheart?" asked she.

"More than Saint's love went to the making of that song, young gentleman," was the judgment of Dan Costard, the bony old priest from Ambresbury.

"We needs must love as we are able, sir," Percival replied. "And, for my part, I hope Saint Mary Mawdleyn will heed my crying and give me good comfort in the end."

"Comfort is the man's part in crying matters," says the shipman; "and comfort I have in my pocket for thee."

"I want none of your comfort, I thank you, Master Smith," Percival cried, to which the shipman retorted that he had been glad enough of it once upon a time.

With a tale from Dan Costard, which has been told in another place, the day wore to an end. They came out of Hants into Surrey by the sandy way of Farnham, and rested that night within sound of the tumbling weirs of Wey, in the guest-chambers of the Abbot of Waverley. Percival charmed them to sleep by his sweet singing.

CHAPTER VI

HOW PERCIVAL ROSE WHERE CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD FELL

NEXT morning it might have seemed that Percival had reached, and over-reached, his zenith of ascension. For the prioress, rising too early for Mass and walking abroad to meditate, found him with Mawdleyn Touchett in a singular situation. The girl, in fact, was seated by a fish-pond with her feet bare and still wet from the water, and Percival on his hands and knees before her, ardently embracing and kissing those same wet feet. "Oh, dearest feet!" he was saying; and she, "Ah, foolish boy! ah, foolish boy!" The prioress coughed, not loudly; the cuckoo, which happened then to be calling over the meadows, obscured the discreet sound. So Percival pursued his amorous transports and Mawdleyn suffered the raptures afforded by such homage undisturbed. "Boy and girl," mused the prioress, "together in the spring pastures; flowers all about them, flowers in their faces, flowers making sweet their breath. Shall not flower lean to flower? What harm do they do? They have

all life before them ; mine is rounding its course. Let life for me end on a mellow note. This Piers is a gentle boy—good blood, I feel assured, sings in him ; he hath not a pipe so true for nothing. And if my niece played the mischief with Perceforest, Piers Thrustwood shall wash away the stain. Pretty dears, I will not disturb them ; but I will question Captain Brazenhead a little further."

Questioned, the Captain (who had been picking rose campions) lifted his shoulders to his ears, lowered his brows, produced indefinitely his mouth to meet them, spread his palms, then solemnly enfolded his bosom. He gave the effect of an inverted arch, and implied deference, noble humility, some philosophy, and a friendly alliance of benevolent neutrality. "Madam," he said, "may I not add, Reverend Friend, these pretty plays of my enamoured nephew and your lovely niece may end (why should I not say it ?) as they ought to end. If I applaud my nephew's sagacity, may you not in turn approve this tribute to your niece's beauty ?"

"Why," said the prioress, "there has been such tribute paid before—for instance, by one Perceforest, my brother's page. Sincere enough, I have no doubt ; but tribute is to be valued by the worth of the tributary."

"Have at you there, dearest madam," returned Captain Brazenhead, warmly ; "have at you there ! If we are considering *worth*, for example !"

"You refer, I suppose, to King Assurbanipal and the fair Mantagyra?" said the prioress.

"I did refer to their Majesties, I confess," replied the Captain.

The prioress had no enthusiasm for this exalted pair. "I fear," she said, "that the title and estates have been alienated long since. Such things would have appealed to my brother Sir Simon's understanding before a fine descent. As for lineage, indeed, the Touchetts do pretty well."

"Touchett! Touchett!" said the Captain, "dear, dear, dear! Oh, Touchett is a good Norman house. Your Rolf Touchett held up the Bastard at Pevensey, I believe. Very fair! very fair! But the King of Assyria, but the Peer of Charlemagne, Partenopox of Blois, Palmerin, Tyrant the White!"

"Captain Brazenhead," said the prioress, with dignity and point, "when you exalt your house at the expense of my own, you compel me to ask myself why the scion of Partenopox of Blois took the trouble to abduct a stable-boy and hide him naked in a ditch on Winchester Meads?"

"Thomas on the Pavement!" said the Captain to himself. "What a still puddle it is!" Aloud he said: "Rack and pincers, madam, could not force me to tell you what that boy had done, or how far he deserved what he got." This was perfectly true, and the prioress believed it.

"I will not apply such insistence," she said, mildly, "for I agree with you that it would fail."

"Ah, madam," said the Captain, taking her

hand, "you and I know the world." This pleased the prioress, who did not immediately perceive how little it met her argument. "Madam," the Captain went on rapidly, "if my dear blood is perhaps too dear to my barren loins; if in default of lawful issue—of issue, I should say (if I speak the whole truth); if mindful of my ancient race; if with a heart overfull, outvailing head overtaxed; if philogenous, if stirpiferous, puffed with pedigree, prolific, wily, fertile in shifts; if one and all these things I stand naked to the world, do you wonder, dear and gentle lady, that I run to cloak myself in You! If by the hand, a shorn lamb, I lead my pretty nephew; if I bid him curry your nags, hold your stirrup, batter soft your cushion, sing to you, tell you age-long romance, bear your napkin on his arm, your livery on his King-begotten back—if I do this, why do I do this? Because I love the boy, madam, and because——" the Captain bared his head, kneeling, "and because I love your ladyship! Yes, madam," he went on bitterly, "the bloody, crafty, notched, maimed old soldier is touched at last! You will not misunderstand me, I know. I love indeed; but as Plato, as the Seven Sages, as Ptolemy, as Hermes the Threefold Mage, as the Abbot Ammonius, as Simeon Stylites, as the Venerable Bede, might love. Spiritually, that is inwardly, in the skyey places, under the shadow of angels' feathers. Is it madness to love so? Then Plato was mad, then Venerable Bede was an ass. Is it wicked to love

so? Then it is wicked to seek your shelter for my nephew's nakedness. Is it hopeless? Then I am damned. Are you angry? Then I hope I am damned. Are you content? Then I sing *Gloria Tibi*, and recall memories of my good mother, at whose knee I learnt to say *Amo te devote!*"

The Captain, out of breath, but filled instead with the soft wind of ecstasy, rapturously kissed the caught hand of the prioress. She, confused, had little to say. Percival and Mawdleyn, who came upon her while their mouths were still much too close together, had still less to say. They parted as by a thunder-shock and stood still, their heads hanging like tired roses. "Children," said the prioress, "where have you been?"

"I walked in the meadows, if it please you, good aunt," says Mawdleyn, "and Piers has dried my feet for me."

"Do you understand this service then, Piers, as well as that of minstrelsy?" asked his mistress.

Percival modestly replied that he had done his best to understand it, and so should always do with every office which might please her good ladyship. They went back through the fields to hear Mass and break their fast. The buttercups were so tall that they brushed Mawdleyn's knees and dusted her with gold—a charming sight, which, as Captain Brazenhead remarked, made Danae of the girl, and so of Percival an object of contempt to all high-minded men. "Perceforest, my young sprig," he improved the occasion by

saying, "the pace is too hot to last. We cannot stay, you and I, at such a course. We must break away, Percival, lest we be broken." Percival was too flushed with adventure to heed him. "My cup is full, sir, shall I not drink? For such a morning as this I would contentedly be drubbed every night by Sir Simon himself. Oh, her feet! Oh, her tender hands! Oh, her heart!" And so on, and so on. All this filled his friend with disquiet.

On their way by Crooksbury to Guildford and the White Down, Captain Brazenhead drew from the stores of his garnered experience that remarkable tragic tale which decorates another page; but interesting as it, and subsequent comments upon it, might prove, great press of matters drives me forward to Reigate. Fear of congestion, in like manner, compels me to pass over the noble country through which winds the Pilgrim's Way —Compton and Littleton Cross, Saint Catherine's Chapel on the side of a chalk down, Shalford Meadows, and Shalford Ferry, Guildford town, and the long grass road which draws you up to Saint Martyr's Church and the wooded ridge. You shall picture our company riding there among the boughs, and guess what opportunities for pilfer—stolen looks, stolen touches, half-heard sighs, whispers, vows—"Dearest feet! dearest feet!" and "Ah, foolish boy!"—there may have been; what earnest talk also held the Captain to the side of his prioress, and how Master Smith's wife lived silently upon the sight

of her bluff husband's eyes. Those galliard eyes were much intrigued by Percival's long nose, out of whose shape the baffled shipman read mystery, a long-lost sweetheart masquerading as a lad, Captain Brazenhead for a terrific rival, himself for a flouted man. There is meat for a tale here. But I am drawn instead to Reigate, a red town on a hill, where you might have found a noble Priory of Austin Canons, with great welcome for their Sister of Ambresbury; a large inn called The Christopher, and a little beerhouse named The Holy Fish. Thither, under the shades of evening, Captain Brazenhead drew young Percival Perceforest, his nephew by adoption, sadly against inclination and nature.

"By Cock, my bird of the bough," said this warrior, expostulant, "thou hast had thy fill of toying with thy dear. Work of men is now on hand, battle-work, hack-and-hew, blood and bones, a tragic dish. Am I to remind you that you are beholden to me? Never in this life, I hope."

"I shall never forget my duty to you, sir," said Percival warmly, already ashamed of his back-sliding.

"Why, that is as well," returned the Captain, "for I assure you there will be every temptation. But, in my opinion, you hold the iron and should strike before it cools. The prioress, let me advise you, has discovered (how, I know not) my innocent little device at Winchester; and although I was able by my arts to give her a check, she is a

singling hound, of whom God alone can predict (if He will) how soon she will be nose-in-air again. Therefore, Percival, I say, Time is. Cut the way of Holy Thomas, tuck your sweetheart under your arm, take the road, ride with me—and ho! for war and dead men's shoe-leather. How does this strike you?"

It seemed a delightful plan to the speaker, whose surprise was extreme when Percival drew back. "What, bawcock, art thou faint?" he cried, generously putting the best excuse foremost. But Percival was not faint. He was, on the contrary, very red; his eyes were misty, his lips dry. He had to use his tongue to them before he could avow the shameful truth to his benefactor.

"Oh, sir," he faltered, after many a false start. "Oh, sir, do not be angry; but I cannot deceive my mistress much longer."

"Hey," cried the Captain, "why? does she smell smoke, do you think?"

"No, no," Percival assured him; "but my conscience——"

"Lord of battles, boy!" the Captain roared, "don't talk of conscience to me. We have our fortunes to make."

"Let it be then," says Percival; "but I dare not add robbery to my fibs."

The Captain stopped in mid-street, and raised his eyebrows as if he saw a snake in the gutter.

"Robbery!" he said in a whisper; "why, what are maidens for if not to be robbed?"

"Sir, sir, the Reverend Prioress herself would be robbed if I took Mawdleyn away," says Percival.

The Captain gaped at him. "Well?" he said, "why not? Why are we here, knights of the road? Why is she here? Why have I told so many falsehoods, and why hath she believed them, hey?"

"I don't think she hath believed them, sir," says Percival humbly.

The Captain scratched his nose. "Tush! I must be sadly out then," he said. "Do you think it was Tyrant the White she stuck at?"

"Sir, I think rather it was Mantagyra the Kurdish princess. But Partenopex of Blois seemed to me rather a hard morsel."

"Blois is good enough," said the Captain; "it must have been that rascally Tyrant. To tell you the truth, I had hoped that Blois would edge me in the other, a great favourite of mine—especially with a lady who could listen all day to the *Romaunt of the Rose*. And I do confess that she seemed to know something about my little contrivance at Winchester. Well, well, I am vexed about this. But everything conspires to further my counsel to you, Percival. Cut and run, my twittering finch, cut and run."

"Sir," said Percival, doggedly, "I will run whithersoever you bid me run; but I shall leave Mawdleyn behind."

"Then you tire of her?" asked the Captain. "I am not surprised. The girl is too ripe for her age. Thin ones pall not so soon."

Percival's little eyes kindled. "Captain," he says hotly, "I love my Mawdleyn better than life or heaven, but I will never tempt her to wickedness."

"You will find that quite unnecessary," said the Captain. Percival despaired, and changed the conversation by asking abruptly, What was the duty about to be put upon him, which he was quite ready to perform?

"Why," says the Captain, "it is this. We are about to visit an exalted friend of mine, here in this town, darkly disguised for the exact purpose of meeting with me. He is a gentleman (at present) of greater hope than fortune, and goes —oh, hush!" he sank his voice to a rushing whisper which could have been heard across the street; "and goes—ah, be mum!—by the name of CADE. Master John Cade, Jack Cade, Jack Mend-all; so those who love him call him. But, look you here, his name his Mortimer, seed of the loins of King Edward the Third, twin-apple on the stalk which holds King Edward the Fourth——"

"King Edward the—oh, sir!" says Percival, in a tremble, "why, this is treason!"

"Treason it is," replied the Captain, chuckling; "damnable treason, and misprision of treason; work for Tower Hill, block-work, chopping-work, my Ganymede."

"Is it this that you would have me do?" Percival asks; and the Captain, taking his arm, says—"It is! It is!"

They stroll on in silence. Presently Percival asks again, How he can serve Mr. Cade? The Captain became very frank.

"Why," he said, "you must know that my friend Mortimer (call him Cade, if you will), although of extremely noble descent, is in this pass, that he can neither read nor write. Other gentlemen of birth and lineage are no better off. We write our names in blood, ha! And here are our stiles, ha!" He patted his hip. "Now Jack Mortimer," he went on, "corresponds with the D——e of B——y, the D——e of Y——k, my L——d of M——h, the K——g of F——e"—these names he indicated in whispers—"and hitherto hath done his best to cope therewithal by help of an old monk of Bury, a Psalter, and the *Gesta Romanorum*. The result hath been that Jack's correspondence is in a devil of a mess. Moreover, the monk is recently dead of a surfeit. You, my lamb, having the Latin, the French, the Burgundian, the Italian, on the tip of your red tongue, you I have designed to be Jack Mortimer's secretary, from the moment when I first saw you, slim and tearful like Niobus the Great, in Winton Minster. You say that you have deceived the prioress; me you could not deceive. I saw tongues plying for hire about your ingenuous front; everything you have done since has but confirmed my opinion. Now, I need not tell a youth of your parts that I open out a golden road for you to travel. Jack will go far. He is ready at all points. His men line the road. London stirs

for him; Kent calls him King. He will give thee a manor and a title, for thou shalt be his right hand. Sir Percival Perceforest, knight; Percival, Baron Perceforest; my lord Viscount Perceforest; *our trusty and well-beloved Cousin and councillor Percival, by the Grace of Jack, Earl of*—— Where the devil do you come from, my dear?"

"From Gloucester, sir," says Percival.

"I perceive that you speak the truth, for you call it Glorster. Then you shall be Earl of Gloucester, when my good lord R——d is P——e of W——s." Thus comfortably, as the Captain mused aloud and poor Percival found nothing to say, they reached the shuttered green door which announced by a sign on a string that it was that of The Holy Fish. There hung the fish, with a hole in the shoulder where St. Peter's thumb had held it.

"I must disguise myself, boy," says the Captain. "Mum's the word now; Moonlight work begins. You carry innocence all over your face, but I have a plaguily fly-by-night appearance and must by all means conceal it."

His method of disguise was admirably simple, for he merely threw his riding-cloak over his head. Thus he could neither see nor be seen, neither deceive nor be deceived. This done, he made Percival take his hand, saying, "Lead on, noble colleague." Percival followed his nose into the doorway of The Holy Fish.

A black-haired, stout, blotch-faced man sat in dirty shirt and breeches at a tressle-board, eating

bacon from a skewer. A jack of beer was at his elbow, onions reposed in a basin of vinegar beside him; all about his feet lay letters, parchments, sealed writs in a heap.

His companions were a miller in his cups and a Carmelite. Percival stood modestly in the open doorway, still holding by the hand the muffled, the motionless Captain Brazenhead. The eater of bacon frowned upon the pair.

"What do you want, knave?" then said Master Cade, for this was he; "and who is your mawmet in a shroud?"

Captain Brazenhead threw off his disguise with a flourish.

"God help this realm, Jack, if I deceive even thee!" he said with fervour. Master Cade resumed his bacon; the Carmelite had never stopped eating onions; the miller went to sleep.

Between bites the great revolutionary asked of his friend, Who was this sprig of jessamy? The Captain introduced his dearest nephew-by-adoption. "He hath a long nose," said Master Cade, "too long for my taste. We are sworn foes of long noses in Kent, as thou knowest. What are we to do with him, Sol?"

"He was born under Sagittarius the Archer," says the Captain, "and is therefore lucky. Start not at his nose; I tell you he is a penman. I have trained him for thy secretary, Jack!"

Master Cade said Humph! to this; but of Percival he asked, "Where gat Sagittarius your father, you of the body of your mother?"

"Sir," replied Percival, "I fancy that Captain Brazenhead spoke tropically, by a figure. My father's name is John Perceforest; he is a clothier of Gloucester."

"You said he was an archer, Sol," said Master Cade.

"I spoke exuberantly, as this lad says, and in the tropics," the Captain admitted. "Leave his father and his nose alone, Jack."

"Stop that cackle," cried Master Cade, who seemed excited, "and let me get on with the boy. Now, boy, I have the truth of thy father at last. Is that nose of thine his or thy mother's?"

"My mother, sir, had a longish nose."

"Losh!" said Master Cade. "Now, who was your mother?"

"My mother is dead, sir."

"I asked you not what she is!" Master Cade was very testy. "Plague! will you prevaricate with me? I asked you who she was."

Percival answered, "She was very well descended, sir, as I have been told. Her name before wedlock was Jane Fiennes."

Master Cade grew livid, "Lord of Might! and with a nose like that!" He paused to breathe; presently asked, "And whence came your Jane Fiennes?"

"She came from Kent, sir," says Percival. Cade threw up his hands and brought them down with a crash on the table. The miller rolled on to the floor and the Carmelite slipped out of the room.

"If I knew not his nose among a hundred! Jane Fiennes's son, Jane Fiennes's son!" Master Cade was much perturbed. "Do you know who you are, young gentleman?" Thus he accosted Percival, who answered, "An honest lad, sir, if it please you."

"Honest!" cried Master Cade, "honest! you are better than that, I hope. King Melchior! I'll tell you what you are. You are nephew of Lord Say, that's what you are! Nephew and heir-apparent, that's what you are! And you hope yourself honest! Why, sir, you may be a peer of this realm. No need for honesty then, I hope. Honest, quoth he!" He changed his tune abruptly, and turned to the complacent Captain Brazenhead. "Didst thou lay this trap for me, old gallows?" asked his chief.

"I'll not deny it, Jack," said the Captain.

"It will serve my turn," says Cade, "or may do. When we have cracked the old thief's skull at Sevenoaks, we'll set up this slip of willow in his place, and have a lord on our side. Do you smell? Are you fly?"

The Captain smelt, and was very fly. "Let me talk to my honoured young friend," he said, and drew Percival apart.

"Now, Percival," he began, "it appears that you are in a fair way. Your mother was Lord Say's sister, and none the worse in that her brother is an old cut-throat, ill-beseeming dog. You are heir to the wicked man your uncle. Now I propose to you an honourable game, fitting to

your name, degree, expectation, and parts. You shall stand in with the noble Mortimer and me. We raise all Kent, attack Sevenoaks, slay your uncle at leisure. You come into title and estates, marry your little Touchett (if she still content you), and reward us after your own generous motions. Do you see your way clear? I protest," cried the delighted Captain, embracing his young friend warmly; "I protest that it is as workmanlike a little cabinet of villainy as I have ever compassed! What is more, it will be of real service to you."

But Percival did not see his way to the murder of his uncle, and told Captain Brazenhead as much, with tears of shame in his eyes.

"Dear sir," he said, "I know not what you will think of me—ungrateful, unworthy of your continual favours. I owe you all my earthly happiness; but do not ask me to kill my mother's brother. I will die for you, or at your hands, if you choose; but I cannot dabble in my own blood. Slay me now, Captain Brazenhead, where I kneel"—and kneel he did—"and let Percival die blessing the hand that fells him."

The Captain, profoundly touched, raised him up and kissed him.

"Your sentiments, my Percival, do you honour," he said, "though I deplore their effect upon my plans. I must consider what will be best to do now, for I'll be hanged if I know off-hand."

Master Cade had a way of his own. "If the

young gentleman can't help us, Sol," says he, "we had better help ourselves. We should put a winger into him at once, I believe. He must never leave Reigate alive."

The Captain shook his head. "No, no, my Trojan," he replied, "that is a short-sighted way to work. You may trust Mr. Perceforest, I am sure." He added in a low voice, "A friendly Lord Say will be better than two dead ones, you fool; let the boy go." Turning to Percival, he kissed him again, saying, "Remember your old Brazenhead in after years; for now I must bid you farewell. If I have served you, I am glad. I love you, my boy, and shall pray for you every day. Note this also. You shall do wisely to force your pilgrims on their way with all speed. Kent will be on fire within a week. At Canterbury you shall see either myself or my sprite. Farewell."

"Farewell, dear sir," said Percival brokenly. They parted affectionately, like father and son: Percival went out with tears in his eyes.

CHAPTER VII

"INCIDIT IN SCYLLAM, CUPIENS VITARE CHARYBDIM"

THE Captain gone, not without comment and discussion, in which Percival's explanation played a poor part, our young man found himself involved in a new difficulty. Smith the Shipman located his long nose. "Gloucester knew that nose of thine," he declared, "as I do verily believe. But her name was not Thrustwood—no, nor nothing like Thrustwood." Percival did not deny that he had been born in Gloucester. "I would like to see thee deny it," said the shipman. "I would swear to thy long nose and button mouth before the Lord Mayor of London. And how comest thou," he asked reproachfully; "how comest thou tramping after a wicket old tosspot mercenary on pretended pilgrimage, all in a page's breeches? Fie upon such unwholesome dealing!" Percival grew very angry, as well he might; whereupon the shipman turned his gall to tenderness. "Child, I loved thee once; pledges we exchanged, we split a coin. I vowed I'd never forget thee, upon my soul." "I vow that I have never seen you before, sir, in all my

life!" cried Percival hotly, "nor your good mistress either!" "Jealousy," quoth the shipman, "jealousy is the mother of lies. What is my wife to thee or to me, who cry back old dead days!" But here, happily, that same lady came out to show what she was to her lord: "Tease not the boy, honey, tease me!" Thus she wooed him, and left Percival to his other anxieties. These were to get his people well on the road before it was taken by the grim Captain Cade, and to ponder how he could save his mistress's skin, his own skin, and the skin of his exalted uncle.

By ten of the clock—so successful was he—the whole train was in the Vale of Darent. They baited at Otford under the shadow of the Archbishop's house, whence, if Percival could have known it, he might have seen the threatened turrets of Knole high on the wooded hill of Sevenoaks. From that place a very agreeable tale from the prioress took them peacefully to Wrotham, where they stayed out the heat of the day. If Mawdleyn had to complain that her lover was cold she did him an injustice. He was consumed with fear on her account; the country was ominously quiet, with no pilgrim-booths in Wrotham town, no folk in the inns, few houses that had not shutters over the windows. They had halted at a smithy a few miles out of the town: "You must limp it on three feet, Master," was the answer Percival got. "There is not a scrap of iron short of Maidstone, I do believe."

"What have you done with your iron, Master?" asks Percival. "Ah," says the farrier, "that is telling." A bad answer; but worse was to come.

After dinner, going by the well-worn lane that lies snug under the bosom of the hill, they reached a little place called Trottesclive, some three miles from Wrotham. Here were an inn, a village-green, a spreading sycamore with a sign-post, a stocks, and a pound. Here also was an armed assembly of peasants, a priest at their head, marching the opposite way, with ribald songs about Jack Nape and Harry our King. Now Jack Nape was the name they chose to give the Duke of Suffolk, and the scythes, bills, falchions, glaives, and other weapons they flourished, boded no good to Harry their King. There was much confusion here: the men-at-arms of the prioress at once became none, by throwing down their pikes and falling upon their knees. Half-a-dozen rascals roared "Down with the fat minchin!" half-a-dozen others snatched up the discarded pikes. Dan Costard showed his mettle. "We are Saint Thomas's pilgrims, you rogues," cried he. "Touch us in jeopardy of Saint Thomas;" and Percival, resenting extremely their reference to the prioress's condition in this world, drew his dagger.

The shipman leapt off his horse and caught the poor young man round the waist. "Vex not thy pretty hand with a man's tools, my fair chuck," he said coaxingly. "What if thy disguise should undisguise thee?"

"Avoid me, by heaven, you red fool!" cries Percival in a fury. "What have you to do with me?"

"Love, my hidden treasure!" said master Smith. "Love is my goad. I know what I know." Percival flamed up.

"Get you gone, look after your wife, master, and don't talk your balderdash to me," he said with his teeth together. The shipman replied that tempest suited a pretty lass better than a flat calm; so women were not like the sea. Percival stared open-mouthed at him. "What is your meaning?" he said aghast. Master Smith might have told him, had he not been recalled to his wife's side by her shrill complaining. Once more, therefore, that thin woman set Percival free. He turned to the fray; but this had been composed by a colloquy between Dan Costard and the priest, the leader of the rabble.

The peasants, it seemed, were marching to Sevenoaks, to meet (it was obvious to Percival) Captain Brazenhead and Captain Cade. The youth could not see without emotion so many scythes turned to the dismemberment of his uncle, my Lord Say. He felt the call of blood as well as the admonitions of piety. "Strange!" he thought. "Yesterday I did not know that his lordship was my uncle, and to-day I must risk my life to save his. But it is so!" He therefore accosted the rebel priest in the gentlest manner he could, inquiring whether he was leading his forces against any person of consequence. "There is a

worthy man dwelling by Sevenoaks," he added, "my uncle, whose estate, though it should fall to me by the fact, I would not willingly have disturbed." The priest, having looked him up and down, said, "Bless your innocence, young man, we shall never hurt any uncle of yours." Percival could afford to say, "I wish I could believe it." "But," he went on, "I fear the worse from what I know of Master Mortimer, your friend."

"Ha!" says the priest, "so you know something."

Says Percival, "Yes, I do."

The priest rubbed his chin. "And did he intend any mischief against your uncle, young gentleman?"

"I do verily think so," says Percival.

"Then," said the other, "either you are not what you appear, or Master Mortimer's net hath a small mesh."

The shipman cut in again. "If he is what he appears to you," he said strongly, "then I am a nun."

"And if he is not what he appears to you and to me," cried the Scrivener, very much excited, "then I was neither deaf nor blind at Winchester, and do know his name, and can shrewdly guess at that of his uncle."

"My reverend," said Percival, who thought it safer to take no notice of this interruption, "I may not tell you my uncle's name, lest you should do a mischief to those I serve here as faithfully as I can. Alack! I have too many interests to serve,

I think. But I will ask you to take a message for me to a hidden nobleman who passes under the name of B——d" (he sank his voice in uttering the word of power), "Captain S——n B——d. Are you acquainted with him?"

The priest scratched his head. "Is it a wondrous hairy man? Has he a forest on his nose, hairs on his lip and chin, and fierce hairs which push upwards on his throat like ivy on a stock? Is it a loud talker, speaking of things which he knows little about, and the loudlier speaking the less he knoweth? Is he a kidnapper and a horse-stealer? And doth he affect the use of tongues?"

"In many things you have rightly drawn the man, but in the accusation of various crimes I hope you are wrong towards him," Percival replied with guilty knowledge painting his ingenuous face. "At least I suppose him to be the hairiest man in this realm. Tell him from Piers, that if he loves yet the youth he loved once, he will do nothing to hasten the inheritance nor his own reward."

The priest winked one eye as he said, "Your message is dark. But shall I not *essay* it?"

"Hush, oh hush!" Percival whispered, finger on lip; "you will undo me."

"Tush, my lord," quoth the priest, "all shall be well."

He left Percival in a cold sweat; and having made him a profound reverence, drew off his people, who went with songs and cheering for Jack Mend-all. Percival resumed his escort with

a heavy heart, and in due time had all safe under the shadow of the famous Rood of Boxley. He could not fail to observe the added respect with which the Scrivener treated him, and was minded to turn that honest man's skill to his own advantage before it might be too late.

For although he knelt before the sacred and wonder-working Image by the side of his tender Mawdleyn, yet the Image cast its spells in vain. He drew no comfortable assurance out of the rolling eyes and wagging head which made the vulgar admire; but the place held an awe for him apart from all that; and the conviction settled down with a weight of lead in his heart that now or on the morrow he must unbosom himself to the Prioress of Ambresbury. And was that to be the end of his fond adventure? Was he to be hounded out of the prioress's livery as Sir Simon had hounded him out of his? Sir Simon had whipped him for pilfering; might not her Reverence do as much for fibbing? Percival's was that girlish nature that clings the faster for stripes: he knew that the end was not to be then, for Mawdleyn was just such another as he, and when girl's nature loves girl's nature the bond will never be broke. Was such a love as his to be strangled by a confessed fib? Could he abandon his dear, soft, loving maid because his name was Perceforest and not Thrustwood? He saw Mawdleyn's long lashes brush her cheek, saw her folded hands, her lovely meekness; he felt lifted up. Ah, for her sake he had had thwackings

on his back, for her sake had lain in ditches o' nights, had begged crusts at farmers' doors, had sung dishonest songs to thieves and their drabs in tap-rooms at midnight. For her sake he had been Captain Brazenhead's nephew, scion of the race of Assurbanipal and Tyrant the White, he had hob-nobbed with treason, been misconceived by Smith the Mariner, loosened one groom's teeth, indirectly drowned another, gained a black eye and deceived a noble lady who was so benevolent as to love him.

"Sweet Madonna," he cried, "how I have deceived mankind! Sir Simon Touchett thinks I am a common footboy, whereas I am heir to a lord; Captain Brazenhead thinks I am a rebel, and Captain Cade thinks I am not; the prioress thinks me Piers Thrustwood; Mawdleyn must think me a liar—which I am; and Master Smith believes me a Glo'ster girl, discreditably attached to (and forsaken by) Captain Brazenhead. Alone in my world, the Scrivener knows me for Percival Perceforest, the heir of Lord Say; and I am bound to admit that him, too, I should have deceived if I had thought him worth the while. Is there nobody, then, to whom I have not fibbed or wished to have fibbed? Yes. I had forgotten Dan Costard. That good man is under no misconception as to my real person, because he has never troubled his head about me. To him I will impart my secret. If I am to receive the Sacrament at Canterbury, I must confess to-morrow. He shall shrive me."

He concluded tearfully in prayer, and so

remained until the prioress rose from her knees and took Mawdleyn to bed. Full of resolutions for the morrow, Percival also went to bed.

But Captain Smith drew the Scrivener apart by the parlour fire and said, "Tell me the name of that young spitfire of the prioress's."

"His real name," said the Scrivener, "on his own confession, mind you, is Perceforest."

The shipman clapped a hand to his thigh, with a noise like a carter's whip.

"Perceforest!" he thundered. "Perceforest of Gloucester! I remember the lass to a hair—long-nosed, thin, snuggling girl—spoke softly and kept her eyes cast down. She had a trick of biting her finger I recall, very captivating to youth. Sometimes it would be the corner of her apron—better, as being less fanciful. Why, man alive, she used to lean against the door-post in Hare Lane by the hour together, and all the evening through, listening to my protestations and tales of the sea—and be at that fingering game all the while! Sakes of me, if I remember that long-nosed wench or not. And her name was Perceforest—now, now, now, was it Moll Perceforest? or Nance? It was Nance. It was never Nance? What did she say her name was, old parchment?"

"I don't know what you are talking about, my good friend," said the Scrivener; "and my name is Corbet, descended from Madame Alys, Countess Dowager of Salisbury."

The captain clawed the Scrivener by the knee.

"Her name was Jenny," he shouted; "Jenny Perceforest, christened Jane! Eh, by the Beacon of our Faith, "I'll remind her of that i' the morn! Now," he pondered, "how did old Brazenguts get hold of such a good girl as that? And why did she traipse after him across all those shires in a pair of cloth breeches? Is it pure devotion to Thomas? Is it want of heart in the man? It is, by heaven! For why? He has cut and run. Oh, I'll have it out o' Jenny i' the morn."

"You shall do what you please," replied the Scrivener, tired of all this; "but I shall go to bed."

"Put me on to a dextrous way," said Captain Smith, earnestly; "give me my sailing orders, and I steer dead into the heart of Jane."

"She, as you call him, will deny you point-blank, as I take it," was the Scrivener's judgment.

"I'll wake her up with a parable," said Captain Smith. "I'll tell her a tale to-morrow will open her eyes."

"You had much better leave that to me," said the Scrivener. "I know more tales of wonder and romance than you know creeks and bays of England."

"Then keep your tales of wonder and romance as I keep the creeks and bays of England," said Captain Smith; "and that is until I want 'em to run to. This is my venture."

"It should also be your wife's venture, if she is the fond woman I think her," the Scrivener observed, with one eye more open than the other.

"My wife," replied Captain Smith, "knows her duty, I believe; and if you come to that, where's the harm of old acquaintance? Why, I knew Jenny Perceforest before my wife knew the Christian Dispensation. My wife was a heathen Norse when I was playing hunt-the-slipper wi' Jane. And if a man that hath travelled the lumpy seas may not have a bit o' fun wi' a long-nosed girl he hath known in——"

The Scrivener had gone to bed.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW PERCIVAL GOT MORE THAN HE DESERVED, THE SHIPMAN LESS, AND CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD HELD OCCASION BY THE TAIL

AFTER the conversation of the preceding night, the shipman became reproachful in his tone to Percival. He disregarded the young man's protests that he was not his own sister, that she was a mother of five at Moreton-in-Marsh, and nearly twice his age. "If so be, Jenny," he said, "that you are mother of five lawful imps, the greater the shame of your cropped head. To dance attendance upon an Italianate cut-throat, an ambusher, a blood-pudding man, with husband and babes crying at home—fie Jenny, fie! But you and I, my girl, shall be friends yet. You have not seen the last of Dick Smith." Percival despaired; but in point of fact his persecutor seemed to give himself the lie, for he left the prioress's party at Charing and hastened on to Canterbury direct, leaving his wife behind him.

They reached Harbledown by early afternoon, and stayed there for a few hours, hard by the

lazar-house of Saint Nicholas. It was held improper to enter Canterbury unshriven; there was hard work before Dan Costard before any of them dared so much as look for the gold Michael on Bell Harry's top. The lepers came clattering out, the good brothers who served them took the horses, the prioress with her company went into the chapel, to touch the relic and prepare for confession. Percival's hour was come. Captain Brazenhead was murdering his uncle, and he was about to murder his own happiness. What a position for a boy in love!

But it seems that not he alone had a weighty conscience to discharge. Consider these facts in order:—

i. The Prioress of Ambresbury confessed that Captain Brazenhead loved her after the precepts of Plato and the Venerable Bede; also that she loved Piers Thrustwood more as a son than the nephew he was plainly desirous of becoming.

ii. Master Smith's wife confessed that she had spied upon her husband on many late occasions, but especially on the previous night. She said that Piers Thrustwood was, in reality, one Jenny Perceforest, who had run away with Captain Brazenhead, and been deserted by him; and believed that her husband was intending to renew an old acquaintance with the young woman. She owned that she was not to be trusted if he did. As she spoke mostly in sobs and the Norwegian language, Dan Costard was occasionally at a loss.

iii. Mawdleyn Touchett confessed that she loved Piers Thrustwood, who was not what he seemed.

iv. Sister Petronilla confessed that Captain Brazenhead had made her a letter-bearer to Mawdleyn Touchett. She did not know what the letter contained except by hearsay. She had taken back an answer. When the prioress told her to apply cold meat to Piers Thrustwood's eye, she gave over her office to Mawdleyn Touchett. She did not know what Mawdleyn Touchett applied, except that it was not cold meat.

v. Percival Perceforest admitted that this was his name; that he was and had been in love with Mawdleyn Touchett both before and after his beating; that he was a deceiver of the prioress, no nephew of Captain Brazenhead, but nephew (on the other hand) of my Lord Say——

"What!" cried Dan Costard, stopping him at this point, "you are not Piers Thrustwood?"

"No, father," says Percival.

"Then," says the priest, "the prioress does not love you as a son, rather than the nephew you are plainly desirous of becoming."

"Alack, but I do desire it," Percival owned.

"Never mind that now," replied Dan Costard; "one thing at a time. The Lady Prioress loves Piers Thrustwood as a son; but if there is no such person she can have no such love. Her absolution, therefore, is easy."

"Then she loves not me, father," said

Percival sorrowfully, "for I have just told you that I am not Piers Thrustwood at all."

"But what do you say about Master Smith's wife," the priest continued, "and her ugly tale about Captain Brazenhead?"

Percival felt this to be a comparatively easy matter. "I say, my reverend, that my name is Perceforest, and own that I have a sister Jenny; but I deny that I am she."

"You are sure?" asked Dan Costard. "Very well, then; Smith's wife can be shriven. Now there is Mistress Mawdleyn, loving Piers Thrustwood, who is not what he seems. What have you to say?"

"Oh, sir; oh, sir," Percival urged, with pleading looks, "Mawdleyn loves me, and I love Mawdleyn. And for that reason I was beaten by Sir Simon, and came creeping back; and for that reason I told fibs, and for that reason I confess them. Further, I say, that if I cannot have her, I must die."

"Well," says Dan Costard, hand on chin; "and why not? It will make everything simple, it seems to me."

"But if I die, I cannot have Mawdleyn, good father."

"Tush!" cried Father Costard, "we are beating the air. Get your Lord Say to plead your cause."

"Alas, dear father, I fear the worst for him," says Percival mournfully.

"Then you can plead your own cause, my

boy," replied the priest briskly; "for then you will be his lordship. But I must insist upon your making a clean breast of it to my lady; this you shall promise me before I shrive you."

"Sir," said Percival, "my confession is in the making. I do but wait to ask Master Corbet, the Scrivener, to inscribe it fair upon a sheepskin."

"Very good," said Dan Costard, and shrived him. Percival spent the rest of his time dictating his lowly confession to the Scrivener, but what with the interruption of his own remorseful tears and the emendations of that worthy man he had got no further than the words, "The humble cry of the heart of P——," when the summons to the road came from the unconscious intended recipient. Percival was called to do his squire's duty, and, worse, he was bid to tell a tale. This he did, as all the world may know if it cares, with direct application to his case, showing how misadventure may be piled on misadventure, and misconception on misconception in affairs of the heart, until (as in his tale) a young man named Galeotto may wed a young man named Eugenio, and Camilla (a young woman), a young woman, Estella, all for the sake of love. It is not by any means certain that this entirely met his own position, as he no doubt intended that it should; what is beyond controversy is that it did point out the dangerous state of his relations with the shipman, and very much affected the shipman's true wife.

So much was this the case that when the tale

was ended, which was after supper in the parlour of the Prior of Christchurch, Mistress Gundrith had a fit of coughing and weeping intermixed, and retired, as she said, to bed. But it is now known that she did not go thither. The intentions also of Percival were widely different from his performances. His resolution had been to charm the prioress first by his romancing and to melt her afterwards by his tears. He charmed her, it is true, but his tears fell on stony ground. For they fell upon the bosom of Master Richard Smith, who, having thrown a handkerchief over his head, had picked him up in the quadrangle (where the lad had gone to compose his mind), pelted with him in the dark down Mercery Lane, and now held him in the cellar of the little beer-house, comforting him with flagons and protesting against all his rage that they should be married in the morn and sail with the first tide. It was then, and not till then, that Percival found out what he owed to the great Captain Brazenhead. For he—but I anticipate.

At five o'clock in the morning there came a flying messenger into Canterbury bearing letters for the Prioress of Ambresbury's grace. These were from her brother, Sir Simon Touchett, and thus conceived:

"LOVING SISTER,

"After my hearty commendations, these let you wite that you must by all means do honour to one Master Perceforest who I believe

is with you. At the least I traced him as far as Winton, which I know he left in your company. Fail me not herein as you tender my welfare. And the Blessed Trinity preserve you in His keeping, and give you all your desires.

"From your brother,

"SI. TOUCHETT, KT.

"*Postscriptum.*—I pray you, Sister, be temperate with my daughter Mawdleyn. And if the said Mr. Perceforest will take her with a fair manor of forty pound for dowry, let it be so o' God's name. I fear I have no more to bestow, for times are hard, and the crops very light this year, owing to the dry weather. I pray God amend it. If the said Mr. Perceforest shows signs of grudge against me for misadventure—and for what I must call shameful mishandling in the past, tell him, I pray you, that I will meet him hereafter on my old knees. Item—I will give two manors of eighty pound clear with my daughter Mawdleyn. I beseech God to grant you a fair reward for your pilgrimage. Your man Costard will marry my daughter to the said Mr. Perceforest. Item, item—I will give a fair thirty-pound land with the said two manors.—S. T., Kt."

A letter, by the same hand, for the "right worshipful and his loving friend, Mr. Percival Perceforest," was enclosed ; and the prioress, after reading this also, sent for Piers Thrustwood. At this moment Mawdleyn's soft cheek was against

her own, and Mawdleyn's soft heart discerned to be beating in fine disorder.

"Dear madam, dear aunt," said this melting beauty. "I beseech you to be a good aunt to poor Mawdleyn. All he did was for love."

"I think so indeed, child," said the prioress; "and no offence either, it seems. But I ask in vain, why was the poor young man whipped for what he is now to be coaxed back to with forty-pound lands?"

"He will need no coaxing, dear madam," Mawdleyn assured her.

But it appeared that he would need much coaxing. He could not be found. He was not in his bed, he had not been in bed, had not been seen since bed-time. Neither had the shipman's wife been to bed. "Is it possible," thought the prioress; "is it humanly possible that my brother knows more than I do? Is it humanly possible that Piers, or Percival, is running after Smith's wife?"

Far from that, Smith's wife was at this moment running after Percival. Percival Perceforest in his shirt, breeches, and one of his stockings was flying for his life through the streets of Canterbury. Close at his heels came Smith's wife, behind her a delighted pack of citizens, crying, "Hold, thief, hold! Take the rogue alive! Rope, rope, rope!" and other like words. How long the chase had held, I say not; I know that it could have held little longer. Percival's breath was gone, his eyes were dim, his feet cut, his shirt

and breeches barely acquainted. Bricks, mud, sticks, stones, whizzed by his ears. "Peg him down! Peg him down!" were ominous sounds of preparation. Percival set his back against a wall and prepared to die hard. On came the mob; another minute had been his last. As if rushing upon what he could not avoid, Percival gave a sudden glad cry and sprang out towards his enemies. But as he did so, these parted from behind—whether by express command, or intuitive sense, can never truly be known. Percival ran through his late pursuers and fell, panting, into the arms of a cardinal, who, properly attended by his foot-page, was advancing down the street. The amazed inhabitants saw this Prince of the Church enfold and kiss a young man who was believed to have murdered a sailor in Mercery Lane. It need not be said that His Eminence, who was inordinately hairy, and fierce in the eye, was Captain Brazenhead in disguise.

His first care was to get rid of the ragtails who threatened the peace. "Avoid, good people," was his sublime assurance; "he whom you seek is not here. He is elsewhere."

His air, his hair, his hat, his cassock and tippet of flame-red, did their work. The men of Canterbury doffed their bonnets to His Eminence and suffered him to lead away their murderer whither he would. Mistress Smith raised shrill cries, but to no purpose. When she denounced Percival, they referred her to the Cardinal. When she scoffed at His Eminence, they referred her to

the devil, and so left her. His Eminence led his young friend into the great church, and producing a bundle of sacking from under his arm, said with great apparatus of whispering and tapping of the nose: "Take this token, Percival, of my travail for you." Percival unfolded the head of my Lord Say; deeply shocked, he gazed at it.

"Let me not raise false hopes in you, dear Percival," said Captain Brazenhead. "Your late august kinsman was not beheaded, as this gift would seem to imply, and as his rank surely warranted. In fact, the ground of my quarrel with Captain Cade (Mortimer as he foolishly calls himself) was this, Should my Lord Say be hanged or sworded? I named the sword, but Jack would have the rope. I exposed the infamy of this; Jack strung him up. We quarrelled irrevocably. Jack led his men towards London and certain ruin. May Jack go in peace! I believe he is a fool, and know him to be without the feelings of a gentleman. A ridiculous, yet fortunate, adventure brings me to your rescue. You remember the prioress's knave whom I laid in a drain on your account? This boy (and I speak to his credit), filled with revengeful feelings, followed me all the way, and at Kemsing denounced me to a justice as his ravisher and the thief of his clothes. Unworthy, you say? Far from that, it is for that reason I have advanced him. I was forced to disguise myself as you see. But what a plight I find you in! Where is your jacket? Where are your shoes? Where are

your points? What have you been about? No scandal, I hope?"

"Scandal!" cried Percival, growing very red, "I say it was scandalous; but I served him well for it."

"Meaning whom?" asked the Captain; and Percival told him, "The Shipman Smith, who would have it that I was my sister Jane, and carried me off with a towel over my head."

"The man is a silly fool, as I always knew," said Captain Brazenhead; "but it must have been simple to satisfy him."

"Simple or not," says Percival, "I did it. For I cut his face open with a grindstone."

"You did very well, bawcock, failing a foot and a half of Toledo," cried the Captain. "By my faith, I know not how a gentleman of your parts could have done better. But we have more solemn business on hand. You and I will go and declare ourselves to the Lady Prioress. I fancy your affair—if you are still in mind for it—will go better henceforward."

Percival grew suddenly grave. "Alas, dear sir," he said; "but I was carried off from my mistress before I could confess to her the wicked truth."

"You will find the truth not half so wicked as you suppose, my lord," said the Captain. "Come, I will conduct your lordship."

"But, sir, consider the danger to yourself," Percival faltered—but, even so, sensibly changing aspect as the new address warmed him.

"Myself, ha?" the Captain snorted. "I am sufficiently protected by my disguise, I hope. I warrant you there will be no trouble on that score. Moreover, that boy who denounced me so took my fancy for the fact that I have engaged him as my foot-page. Have no fear for me, but come, my dear lord, come."

The magnificent Cardinal Brazenhead, every inch a prelate and a prince, took the arm of Percival, who was far from looking what he actually was; and caused the hall porter of the priory to announce the Lord Cardinal of Magnopolis and my Lord Say, to wait upon the Prioress of Ambresbury. I should fail to find words proper to express the surprise of the venerable lady. But Captain Brazenhead by no means failed. He was at once the courtier, the Churchman, and the deferential lover (in Plato's vein). The moment he was face to face with the lady, he advanced towards her, took and kissed her hand. His page in attendance held his tasselled hat—crimson on a black silk cushion.

"At last, dear lady," he said with a happy sigh; "at last my tiresome disguises are over! I can greet your ladyship without fatigue and without embarrassment."

"Oh, my lord! Oh, sir——!" the prioress began; but he put up a deprecating hand.

"Titles of ceremony between us!" he said with gentle amazement. "Lady, you and I know too much evil of the world to affect the world's cozening caresses. We, if you take my

meaning, have suffered, and laboured, ah, and loved, too long on earth to feel any solace out of things like these. But"—he went on, waving the shamefaced Percival into the discussion—"but with the young it is otherwise. An eyass falcon, dear madam, may take pride in her opening plumage, I suppose. Here, madam, is this noble youth, whom you knew as Piers Thrustwood, and I as my dearest nephew, Mr. Percival Perceforest, now (by the unhappy death of his kinsman) my lord Baron of Say; here, madam, is he for whose advantage I adventured as a captain of men's bodies, where men's souls, perchance, are more under my care. His dear kinsman is unhappily slain by rebels; and he (barely escaping with his own young golden life) stands before you—ashamed of the deceit forced upon him, glorying in the stripes wherewith your brother anointed his princely back, and burning (if I may speak of such matters) for the tardy bliss he has dared such hardships to win. My dear lord and nephew"—he turned to Percival—"salute my friend the Prioress of Ambresbury." The young Lord Say knelt down before her.

"Oh, madam, believe me——" he began to stammer; but the prioress raised him and gave him a kiss.

"My sweet lord, my dear Percival," she said, "you shall believe that we love you very much. Come. My charge awaits you."

She shook him by the hand and led him into

her chamber, where Mawdleyn' Touchett was picking her hem to pieces.

"Master," said the Cardinal's new page, "if my mistress casts an eye on me, she'll have me horsed for bathing at Winton."

The Cardinal looked him over. "My lad," said he, "the prioress is my very good friend. Moreover, you must have a rind like a porpoise to stand the May frosts on your naked skin. I shall make something of you yet. Go, boy, purvey me beer from The Rainbow. I do furiously thirst."

It is proper to add that the prioress, Dan Costard, Percival Lord Say, and Mistress Mawdleyn Touchett paid their homage at the Shrine of St. Thomas; and that Captain Brazenhead was appointed Steward of the Manors of Westerham, Knockholt, and Froghole, with a reversion of the Office of High Bailiff of the Lordship of Sevenoaks.

History knows no more of Master Richard Smith, Mariner of Kingston-upon-Hull, nor of Gundrith his wife, native of Norway.

BOOK IV

THE LAST ADVENTURE

CHAPTER I

In his later years, having become a thought pursy in habit, having allowed himself a full beard and ceased to occupy his leisure in extracting the white hairs from it, Captain Brazenhead was also grown sententious. He was fond of dwelling not only upon the comfort which he now enjoyed, but also upon the services by which he had so well earned it. To ensure his own self-respect, I think, the more he was aware of the one the more did he exalt the other. And it may well be that he overshot the mark. To hear him, as four nights a week he was heard by a cowed company at The Man of Renown in Sevenoaks, you would have thought him sheriff of a county at the least; but the deeds whereby he became what he was become should hardly, upon his showing, have earned him less than the Seigniory of Almain. He might—he ought to—have been a Prince Palatine, a Margrave or a Cardinal-Archbishop; instead of which he was steward, we know as a fact, of the Manor of Knockholt—a respectable post, but really no more than that. "The dignity of my high office, the fealty I bear

to our Lord the King, my headship over men, my discretion over women (pretty fools!)"—these resounding exordiums related indeed to no greater office. A man of generous conceit! So it was, in truth, with his gear as it was with his rank. "These ancient halls, this venerable cradle of my race," exorbitantly described his decent lodging with the widow Fych at Goose Green; "my broad acres, that goodly demesne won by this arm in bloody field" told you of his garden of shalotts, two perches of land held by the widow as her dower, in the which Captain Brazenhead in shirt and breeches might be seen of fine mornings sweating like a porous pitcher. But so it was with this great man that, if telling could make a thing great, it became as great as he.

It is a fact that he was in easy circumstances and had been so ever since, as, the reader will remember, the young Lord Say, in the first flush of his gratitude to the most extraordinary man alive in England, had bestowed upon him the stewardship aforesaid. This office, one year with another, brought the Captain in some fifty marks a year and a capon at Michaelmas. Then there were the pickings: at Christmas another capon, common of pasture for his horse, estovers, drift-wood, drink at the Court Leet, drink at the Court Baron, a mark here for a wedding, half a mark there for the return of an heir. All hands agreed that the Captain made himself snug, and would die rich, if he did not go too far. That

he did not so go was not his fault; he went as far as he could, but not near so far as he would. "God ha' mercy upon these Kentish men," he used to say, "for I, his gerent, will have none." That was after a bold attempt of his to revive some of the more ancient *droits de seigneur* under the pretence of a charter of Edward the Confessor. The attempt had failed, partly because the Captain had been too precipitate, partly because the proposed subject, one Agnes Fillhungre, had smacked his face. He had appealed *urbi et orbi*, but in vain. Was not *Mercheta mulierum* granted? Was it not concordant with the laws of the realm, and the laws of nature which say, Take what thou canst get? Lord of light, was it not? "If, by Cock," he had cried, "a lord of the land hath not the parts and passions proper to his grace; and if I, his familiar, his counterpart, the twin-pea of him, the shadow of his splendour in this lordship of Knockholt, have them not, then am I of all men miserable, and no man at all, but a Grand Turk's singing-boy—and so shall ye be, dogs, and dogs-daughters!"

Thus he had cried to the matrons of Knockholt on a hiring day, holding Agnes Fillhungre firmly by the ear—but his indignation was in vain; for not having the fear of God, they set upon him with besoms, and Agnes squealed like a young porker at ringing-time. There had nearly been a riot among the women, and the case was so that the champion of ancient institutions was advised to retire. He had consolations—we

know it was so: there was Kate Comfre, she was one; there was Mall Bythehedge (that wheedler); there was Joan the Reiver. And there were others—there were others. But as time wore on, and his life wore with it a deeper rut in this most arable world, his actions became more orderly, and (by consequence) his recollections the more inordinate.

As for them, I have before now provided you with some of them, in a chastened form, as becomes an historian who values the truth above all things in this world, including his own talents and the prowess of his hero. Captain Brazenhead's own views of truth are well known; he held it in veneration. It had always been so in his stormy youth, it was so now when he sat in the ingle of the Man of Renown, tossing one foot in the air, stroking his portly beard or sharpening his teeth with a file—a favourite trick of his. "By this sword," he would cry to the auditors; "by this sword wherewith I slew the Sophy of Persia, I would let that man go free, cringed he here now, spilt he here his triple crown and rope of balass rubies at my foot, ah, but I would so, could I charge myself before this company with paltering with the truth. For mark you well what once I told the Holy Father as he and I hobnobbed over our toasted cheese and pippins in ale—in the city of Antioch and year of Christ's mercy fourteen and fourteen. "Gossip," said I to that man, and drove a chapped finger into his left pap; "tell me the truth," said I, "and then, but not otherwise we gamesters might cheat the

rope." And he owned that I was in the right and with contrition promised amendment of life, properer conversation and curtailment of strong drink. And then he asked me his benefit of clergy, which, seeing that he was old in years and grave-ripe this dozen of them, I gave him, being then Castellan of that Coast, and Warden of the Marches over against Samaria. So now, then, you see what manner of man it is that invites your ear." They did.

But in accidentals, in such excursions as he was pleased to make from the main thread of his narrative, in what you may call the "Notes and Illustrations" of his theme, I do think that he sometimes strayed. I cannot identify seven ladies, each of whom he may have called wife, still less seventeen. Of his tall sons, whether they numbered seven, seventeen, seventy-seven, or none (for the accounts of them vary), I have found no trace at all. I cannot believe that all his daughters (if any) married sovereign princes; for though I have not searched the Parish Registers of Europe, Asia Minor, the Duchy of Muscovy and the Barbary States, I go by probabilities. I say bluntly, from what I know of Captain Brazenhead, that he was no Lear to let his ailing reason fritter out his spleen. I ask the candid student, would so potent a begetter have remained steward of the Manor of Knockholt, had there been but one Cordelia among those princesses who called him sire? I cannot suppose it. And in any event the point is immaterial,

since his daughters (if any) do not come into this narrative, though his wives (fatal plural !), or some of them, most fatally do.

Exaggeration is natural to the teller of oft-told tales. The number of his exploits increased with his years. "Ten times left for dead; trampled twelve times out by the rear-guard of the host I had led to victory . . . in prisons frequent, in deaths not divisible. . . ." Thus his mortifications grew, as the careful reader will remark, by some twice themselves every few years; and thus, I cannot but think, swelled the number of triumphant trophies of his chivalry. I give below a remarkable list, which speaks for itself better than any brave words of mine could do. And so it shall, when I have prepared the student for a curious obliquity in it whereby the compiler was accustomed to add to the sum of heroic deeds which he had performed, the number of the extremely unheroic which he had refrained from performing—as if omission to achieve to scandalous feats were in itself a feat. Perhaps he is right; but the list of his conquests, expressed in *souls*, shall now be given.

"With this sword and quivering arm have I:

Of men-at-arms, slain incontinent and with shock . . .	sped 2,000 souls.
Of armies put to flight, by craft, strategy or frontal attack . .	shamed 15,000 souls.

Of chief cities, starved, carried, ruined, havocked, and put to the sword . . .	slain at the least 360,000 souls.
Of Heathens, Anabaptists, Incendiaries, Atheists, Jews, Rebels, Sheep-stealers* and Hedgerow men . .	cut in strips 321 souls.
Of inspired Maidens confronted in the light of day and put to rebuke . . .	discomfited 1 soul.
Of Popes of Christendom taught the rudiments of their affair . .	at the least, 2 souls.
Of Convents of religious unsacked through the fear of God and arrival of the *posse* . .	excused 10 souls.
Of Malefactors left alive,	if they have souls, then 5 souls.
Of Sepulchres rescued from the Infidel . .	say, 1 sepulchre."

We reach, the reader sees, the astonishing total, in men and sepulchres alone, and not counting walls, towers, horses, ships, barbicans, cathedrals, bedchambers and the like, of 377,339 souls and 1 sepulchre. These figures speak for themselves; and will be all the preface I

require for the great, unheard-of, and not to be paralleled occurrences which I have now to relate. They are all the preface, I say, but they are an indispensable preface, the minimum of preface with which I can accomplish my serious task.

CHAPTER II

WITH his patron and patroness, my Lord and Lady Say, in their great Castle of Knole, the relations of Captain Brazenhead (through whom, he would oft-time say "they were what they were") were not what they had been in earlier days. It is not unnatural: youth is prone to oblivion. My Lord Say, when he stood as Percival Perceforest, a slim youth somewhat quick to tears, had almost been in the patronage of Captain Brazenhead. Finding him abandoned to his grief in the nave of Winchester Minster, the great soldier had idly picked him up for his occasion and idly served him, when he had served himself. Percival, now Lord Say, forgot all that; Captain Brazenhead, steward of one of his manors, did not. So with her ladyship. Of her, then Mistress Mawdleyn Touchett, he had been wont to speak as a "morsel," or a "toothsome piece"; he had muttered, eyeing her, "curds and cream"; he had called her a cuddling girl. Boy and girl as he had seen them, he had brought them together with a shrug, and left them together with a chuckle. True, he had taken his dues, his wages if you will; but look at it! "To the barony of Say conferred

upon one P. Perceforest, a weeper . . . Per contra—Stewardship of the Manor of Knockholt." It looks ridiculous, so put. And again: "To P. Perceforest, a slip of melancholy, brought into the arms of her who ached, and there left to make her a lady of the land, to say nothing of the mother of peers . . . Per contra—Stewardship of the Manor of Knockholt." Fie upon a penurious world! Here was matter for a grudge.

But the world moved on with these young persons as with him, their stinted benefactor; and if his exploits loomed larger to Captain Brazenhead they waned the smaller to his lordship. There had been a grudge on one part; there was a coldness on the other. My lord was become a courtier, my lady a mother. My lord was often at Windsor, my lady was not. My lord would tap his chin at dinner, leaning back in his great chair, and begin his conversation, "As the King's Grace said to me in the Long Gallery, 'Good, my lord . . . ,'" or "When the prince and I were at supper, and fair Mistress Jane between us . . ." To which my lady never, by any chance, cared to listen, but thought the more diligently of her own little affairs; of what Robin had whispered in the Arras Chamber, and still more of what he would whisper there to-morrow; of what took place when she and Sir Harry were at supper, and, again, of when they would next be supping. My lord, in short, was too often at Windsor, and my lady too seldom; by which it resulted that Captain Brazenhead frequented the Castle and demesne of

Knole, and my lady found that she could not do without him. If a gentleman cease to make love to his lady, some other gentleman will almost certainly do it; and if a gentleman cease to take notice of his benefactor, that benefactor will transfer his benefactions to a more grateful client. The occasions of my Lady Say, therefore, flattered Captain Brazenhead's self-esteem, soothed his pique, and encouraged his services where they were desired. And he was of the greatest possible service.

It had been Captain Brazenhead, and no less a man, who had held the ladder to her casement, while Sir John Caunt was breathing vows against the glass. "Up with you, Sir John, and play the man," had been his exhortation—and up went Sir John. It had been he, too, who, when that famous poet, my Lord Clun, in his own despair and her honour, had cast himself down from a reasonably tall tree, saying, "Earth, receive me! Mawdleyn hath broken my heart, break thou in mercy the casket of it"—it had been Captain Brazenhead, I say, who had procured the trusses upon which he was to expire, saying, "Down with thee, pretty boy, and suppose her to be there," and he again who had brought to my lady, waiting in the arbour, the joyful news of my lord's fluttering breath, which would reassure her that he still lived. And when it became very necessary to tell the too fervid gentleman that he must hold off for a while, and that the virtuous wife could not listen to what was meant for the hearing of the tender

friend, Captain Brazenhead did that delicate office after his manner. "By Cock and his father, my lord, I would give her time. What said Joggin to the tinker's drab?" What or what not he said, we shall never know; but my Lord of Clun removed himself for two months of the summer, and went over sea; and my lady took a retreat with the Minoresses of Guildford, and all was indifferent well.

Now this was the state of affairs upon that fatal night of Lammas in the year 1477. Pray be so good as to remark the date. Seventh child of a seventh child, born out of time in the seventh month, he was now in the year 1477.

He ought to have known, belike he did know, that Fate could hardly pass over such an occasion as this. Whether he knew or not, he held his head high when he received from the lips of Margaret Mallow the summons to the grapple. Margaret Mallow, the full-favoured, the sloe-eyed, the apple-cheeked, had come to his lodging, and had up and spoke. The Captain, high in wine and beef, had saluted her according to his wont, and she had said, "Fie, Captain, for what do you take me?" His answer had been—and the very stars in their courses, I think, had stayed them to hear —"I take you, Meg, for my comfort and solace. By this warm heart that never yet called maiden wife, hear me swear." Rash asseveration, rash oath!

She heard him swear in such fashion that her heart beat: and at that moment the church clock

struck seven, and a very bright star left its socket in the vault and flew, burning red, right across the zenith, and disappeared with a noise like water on the fire. Captain Brazenhead started and looked all about, but did not take his arm from Meg Mallow's middle.

"By Cock, am I called?" he said; "by Cock, am I? Fling forth, my fancy, and flout Fate," said he.

These are memorable words.

CHAPTER III

Upon this fateful night, all in the twittering dark, stood Captain Brazenhead at what he did not then know to be the very nick of Destiny. He had thought it to be the trysting tree, a holm-oak of unknown antiquity and high veneration; really, it was much more, being indeed what, in a figure, I have indicated. There stood he muffled to the eyes in his red cloak, with his sword acock behind him as stiff as a pointer's tail, in one hand a dark lantern, in the other his feathered cap—there stood he, as many and many a time he had stood before; and over against him, near enough to be provoking, yet far enough to be mystifying, was the tremulous, hooded and bescarfed form of a lady—as many and many a time had lady been before. Now this lady was not the Meg Mallow of the previous chapter, although that buxom and wholesome girl was within hearing distance, but her mistress of life and member, my Lady Say, once Mawdleyn Touchett the plump, the brown-eyed—plumper now and fuller in the eye. She indeed was upon her fair knees before Captain Brazenhead, and if her eyes were fuller it was because they were full

of tears. Tears welled freely from her fine eyes, bedabbled her cheeks, relaxed the guard of her lips and gave her heart dangerous eloquence. To hear her were to have an education in love; but Captain Brazenhead was an old prizeman there. Where she was humid, he was dry.

"O Salomon, O dearest friend!"

"Tut, my dumpling of pleasure," said he.

"O Salomon, but I am frightened for myself."

"The more pavid you, the fiercer my smart."

"But he will beat me, my friend!"

"Ay, as the cook whips batter—to be the sweeter fare."

She still implored from her knees; she still besought. "Ah, do you not love poor Mawdleyn?"

The Captain's eyes were wide afield, and his hand was now to his chin. Before his heart dangled the dark lantern, swinging from his little finger. "Ay, lady, I love, I love!" he muttered; but he said no more. The fact was that he knew very well where Meg Mallow kept her distance, and exactly how much import this conversation must have for her. She must know—she did know—that he was a lover. His hastily formed shift was ingenious; but it did not serve.

The lady rose from her knees, and drew the scarf over her bosom. "You speak strangely, Master Brazenhead," she said. "I see that I have been deceived in you——"

"By Cock, as how?" he thrust in, but she continued:

"Fare you well. I shall pray for you, as

Christians do pray for their enemies. Myself and my sad fortunes must be served elsewhere." And now she turned him her back.

Nothing stirred Captain Brazenhead so sharply as to be told that anybody, anywhere, could serve a suitor better than himself. It stung him like a wasp. With a "Ha!" which sounded like a snort caught in the folds of a sneeze, he strode forward and took her by the hand. To her averted head he gave the shock of battle. "Tush, madam, tush!" cried he. "By the Lord, I love you in a tantrum, and was tempted to be sententious, as you see. I spake in saws; I was pithy—pith is in the very dregs of me. Be lenitive to the old soldier, sweet madam, to the battle-bruised old Snake of Milan—late tyrant of that city—who for your favours would brave the death-rattles and rigours of a thousand men. Ay! so would he, though Golias stood there, and Fierabras and Mahompelian the thrice-victorious with his leg of brass. Hear me, madam, for I speak advisedly. Greatly as I have dared, greatlier will I now. Deplorably as I have loved—O eyes of sloe!—let your rosy heart deplore me now. I tell you, madam, in most dreadful calm, with this sword shall kings spill purple at your feet—if you have an inkling that way; but not unless. If that will meet your ladyship's case, by Cock——"

It would seem that it did. Mollified, she suffered him to lift her caught hand to his lips. The lantern dangled and flashed as the white hand was drawn to what Captain Brazenhead

called its home. The ceremony performed—"What seek you now of me, lady?" he asked. "Breathe it low—Oh, low!—lest the tree should hear you and fall upon us both in a jealous pet. Such things are done under moon and stars. Dan Ovid says so."

Lady Say regained her hand as she had already her composure. "The tree is well rooted, I believe," she said, "and has taken six hundred years to do it in. It is probable that you will be spared to befriend me. But do you love me indeed? For love will be required of you."

"Love!" cried Captain Brazenhead, to whom the vow was as the trumpet to a courser, as the *Soho!* to a hawk a-wing—and with a maiden attentive under a neighbouring tree! "Love, by Mahomed! O lady—O lady——!" He drew his sword and held it aloft. The lantern swung like a clapper in the wind. "By this sword, by this notch-fringed sword, as brown with old blood as a kettle in a pond—hear me swear!"

This was not to the lady's purpose by any means. "I had rather not hear you swear, my friend," she said, "if for no better reason than that the vicinage must needs hear you also, and for that secrecy is as much in my business as haste. Let me not hear you say anything, but rather see you do something, and, for our Lady's sake, hot-foot."

"My foot roasts, lady," said Captain Brazenhead. "To your matter."

"My matter," said she, "is simple. The

Lord of Clun wears about his neck my forefinger ring. He must wear it no longer than this day fortnight, for in three weeks my lord returns to Knole, and if he miss it from my finger he will beat me. Now you know the ring."

Captain Brazenhead did know it. "The ring, the ring! Often have I kissed it, as God liveth to give rings. That ring was a plain hoop of gold wire—wherein a sard-stone of size—whereon a figure of the boy Amor, quite naked, entangled by the wings in a net. And you gave it to the songster—fie, lady!"

"I gave it him," said she, "out of pity. Upon the day when he cast himself from this tree for my sake, and was brought upon a hurdle to my chamber, upon that fatal day did I give him the ring."

"Tush!" said Captain Brazenhead. "And now——"

"And now," she said, speaking vehemently and with quickened breath; "and now I must have it again, though you saw him in two."

"That," said Captain Brazenhead darkly, "will be the easy way. I shall devise a better."

"He did not take it as I had intended. He presumed upon it—he did not know an honest lady, whose heart might be touched, whose heart might be conscious of hurt and neglect from a husband tenderly loved—but who could never have supposed; no, never——"

"A truce to your ladyship's suppositions," said Captain Brazenhead. "To the matter. To

the matter. This ring he wears upon his person? Good. But his person—where is that?"

"You will find it," she said confidently, "wheresoever it be."

"That will I, though I cross the Libyan desert upon my knees," he vowed.

"It will not be necessary, and the method will be too slow. I can give you seven days to find Lord Clun, seven days in which to regain my ring, and seven for your return. I believe that he is in Navarre."

"In Navarre, lady?"

"In Navarre. His sister Ann, you must know, married the Count of Picpus."

Captain Brazenhead fell back as if he had been shot. The dark lantern clattered against his heart, and went out.

"Picpus!" He breathed the word inwards, not outwards as is the usual practice in European countries. "Picpus! Am I once more to be involved with a Picpus!"

"I have no reason to suppose so. The Count of Picpus has a Castle at Gavarnis, on the confines of Navarre. There, I believe, you will find my Lord Clun. My counsel to you is to have as little as may be to do with the Count of Picpus."

The Captain stared and muttered; but luckily she could not see him, and so impugn his courage. "As little as may be to do with—ay, lady, ay! Little were much!" He added in an altered

tone: "You must know that aforetime there were many Counts of Picpus."

But my Lady Say was tired. "I must not know what I have no wish to know," she said. "The point is immaterial. A score Counts of Picpus should be nothing to my soldier of fortune." Lightly she touched him on the arm. "Go then, and at once, my soldier of fortune, and know that I requite services by kindness ever. My woman Meg has money and comfort for you. She should be near by."

"By Cock, and she is, madam," said Captain Brazenhead.

"That is well," said the Lady of Knole. "Give me your hand to the priory postern, and then you may return for your furnitures at the hands of Meg."

"Trust me, lady," said Captain Brazenhead, and handed her through the bracken.

CHAPTER IV

HIS interview with the sloe-eyed maid was brief, but is material.

"The money," quoth she, "is safe upon my person—and my person you say is your own. Therefore it may remain upon my person."

"Ay, lady, ay, but look you——"

"I look," said she, "to you—and you, I know, to me."

"By this sword——" he began.

"Leave your sword, Captain," she said quickly. "You may need it for Lord Clun. Now mark me. I am a girl of character. Either you make me what you vowed no maiden had ever been made by you—or the money remains where it is, and your sword where it is. This you do at cockcrow mass or——"

"But, Peg, consider! Consider, my solace! What! I wed you and fly your arms! Never, by the Kings of Cologne!"

"We fly together, dear heart," she said mildly, "or we fly not at all; but rather I return to my lady's chamber and report your false vows of love to me, and false vows of duty to her. And then——"

Captain Brazenhead had one of those moments of doubt which attack the strongest men. King David had many, King Solomon had too many, Julius Cæsar had one, Alexander the Great a dozen. To go back was impossible, to go forward—against a Count of Picpus; "for I too," he gloomed within himself, "I too have pretended to the circlet of Picpus—ah, and to a Countess of Picpus, by Cock!"—to go forward—well, needs must be as the Fates will. He threw up his head. His "Ha!" rang bravely, like a challenge to the stars. "Come, my chuck! Come, my pullet! Together we will fare, and together return—with sheaves, my dear, of old Brazenhead's sowing."

And he clasped her to his heart.

CHAPTER V

I SHALL not recount the stages of a memorable journey, made in the barque *Bonne Espérance*—a barque whose name alone gave memories—from Sandwich to Bordeaux, for they were stages for Captain Brazenhead of little ease, and for his lady also. A brooding fit was upon the fine, sanguine man, which glazed his eyes, palsied his tongue, upset his stomach and impaired his appetite. Golden sack turned sour within him; small beer grew no smaller in his untouched glass. Love, which had never failed him, did not fail him now; but he loved ruefully, as a man desperate. He terrified his mistress at once by his ardour and by his gloom. At a moment he would cry, "With thee I can brave old White-Face, the chill guest"; at the next, "Avaunt, woman, thou knowest not the horrid tale." She did not know it, and he could not tell her; by consequence she pictured it more horrid than any tale could be, except the tale which I have to tell. Strange names were often upon his lips, uneasily moving there like wanderers by the gates of cities—aliens who dared neither out nor in. "Picpus" was one of them. "Picpus! O word of dread!" he would mutter;

and then "Fie upon thee, wench, for a light o' love—Oh, Nicole, oh, straw-haired quean!" He became sententious, with Meg wondering upon his knee. "What said the Young Man Barefoot—what said he? 'Sir,' said he, or rather, 'My lord'—as was then, as you may say, the due of my long sword and hairy arm, 'My lord, your lordship shall travel the length and breadth of your lordship's seigniory, and find no man more wretched than this one.' 'What one, O barefoot young man?' said I, astonished; and he answered, 'He who, having ventured all for his belly, now findeth his belly all he hath to venture withal!' Great words in one so young and so barefoot. But he was a poet; God be good to him above a poet, good lack, and a lover." And then he fell to his glooming again and his muttering of "Picpus! Picpus! O word of dread!" and a mariner, brailing up the mainsail, paused in his toil and hailed him as "Old Sallow-guts," and had no retort at all. It was not well with Captain Brazenhead when such things could be.

Mistress Meg was a lass of spirit and resource, who had not been principal bedchamber woman to a die-away baroness for nothing. All that could be done to stimulate a flagging hero with glancing eye, finger in the mouth, sidelong look or affectionate disposition of the shoulder was done, and handsomely done. But when they were done in vain, the *spretæ injuria formæ* grew hot within her, kindled, and burst forth in flame.

She railed then upon his grizzling beard, upon his straining belt ; she reproached him for his figure, upon his nose that drooped to his chin, upon his chin that lapped upon his chest like idle waves in summer. She called him pot-valiant, a chamber-hero, a knight of the taproom, a tongue-fighter, a cock of the midden. She doubted his prowess, doubted his honour, doubted his love. "A many wenches and a many hast thou cozened, old Frolicsome," cried she. "Who is this straw-haired woman, this Nicole? Who this Picpus? Who thy barefoot poet? Let me tell thee, thou Scandal of Christians, that there are better men than thou abroad ; and give thee to wite that thy Picpus may find a maid of Kent as kind as thou, in thy abominations, thy freckled French woman. Give me no kisses, thou stale pollution, or I scream."

He gave her none, being deep in his dejection ; and the spires and turrets of Bordeaux, the shining river, the shipping, the drums ashore, the sea-birds afloat spread their gallant invitations vainly before as disunited a pair as ever left England arm-in-arm and viewed fair France back-to-back.

The bustle of the landing, the quarrels with the customs, the putting to flight of wharf-men, mendicants, limping veterans and bold women restored a kind of spirit to the hero of a hundred quay-side tussles. "Avaunt, spawn of Mahomet! Out upon ye, night-witches! Pickthanks, I spurn ye!" Such were the bold words of Captain

Brazenhead, as with flashing eye and bristling nostrils he drove into the press. But even so his ills overtook him, for scarce was his last injurious term out of his mouth, when he was struck flat by a memory. "Pickthanks," said I! "There was a Picpus, I do remember. Woe is me, for Picpus lives yet!" His head sank once more, his nose hid in his beard; insensibly he led the way into the town, insensibly to himself, but led, nevertheless, by dogging Fate, his footsteps turned in the direction of the Rue de la Ferronnière, and inevitably, as surely as a blind man is pulled by his dog to the butcher's shop, to the threshold of the tavern of The Stag. Now this was an inn of memories. At the door, it is true, Captain Brazenhead started, threw up his head, and slapped his forehead a resounding crack. "Not here, O seventh-born, not here! Ha, Nicole of the gilly-flower, not here?" But Meg Mallow, out of patience with his tantrums, urged him forward with a vigorous punch in the small of the back. It was done with the knee. "In with thee, thou jelly-bag," cried she injuriously, "and let an honest woman break her fast." It need hardly be said that such things had never happened to the hero before. Headlong to his destiny, Captain Brazenhead plunged into The Stag and scattered a cheerful company.

CHAPTER VI

There were three capuchins sipping old ale; there were, upon the knees of these worthies, three damsels of mechanical smiles and very shrill laughter; there was an old cheese-wife called Joyeuse; there were two apprentices who ought to have known better, and one chantry-priest who did not. In the midst was a very tall man masked, and leaning upon a naked sword, who, the moment he saw the new-comers, fixed his piercing eyes (one saw them like smouldering beacons through the holes) upon Meg Mallow and never took them off her for a single instant. Whose was this awful form? Whose were these enkindled eyes? Who had a nose so long and bony, so bushed about the nostrils with black hairs, so shining with heat that you could have lit a slow match at it, and fired a powder-magazine comfortably? With such a nose you would have no need of a street-lamp to fetch you to your home. A pillar of fire by night! And by day clouds about it, to veil up its majesty from hardy eyes! With such a nose what must the rest not be? But nothing was to be seen of the remaining features saving the deep-recessed, burning and

steady-gazing eyes. Captain Brazenhead—for the first time in his life of violence and crime and gallantry—gaped, bereft of utterance, upon his own equal, alas! upon his more than equal. For who, under heaven's beam, could this be but himself as he knew himself? Cowed and dazzled, he saluted the company mechanically, and received their salutations. The masked magnifico acknowledged him with a mere jerk of the head: all his interest was turned upon the sloe-eyed Mistress Meg.

Never was so strange an entry of so splendid a person. Captain Brazenhead, after a few moments of effort which started the sweat in every gland, gave over and leaned against the wall. Before the enquiring serving-maid he was speechless: it was Meg Mallow who ordered sheep's-trotters in vinegar, black bread and beer; and it was she who ate most of this rare provand when it came. The company in the inn, after raising of eyebrows and essays of the nose, after a wink here, a clack of the tongue there, a "H'm, a choice piece for so much ruin to hold," and the like impertinence, resumed its varied occupation. The tall masked figure only seemed still absorbed in the new-comers; was still closely observant of the damsel, and entirely unconscious of her cavalier; was still inscrutably silent, with a kind of suspended purpose in his meditations, rather dreadful to consider. His air was the air of a hawk in the blue as, high above a gorse-bespread common, he soars and waits, to the consternation

of the finches who flutter and dart in and out of their prickly cover. The figure is not so exact as it might be; for in The Stag there was neither flutter nor darting, and there was only one finch. Captain Brazenhead, thirteenth Champion of Christendom, hero of every shock of arms from Constantinople to Cork, eagle among sparrows, sun among stars, was now that finch.

Noise in the street, the clattering of horses and jingling of brass on the flagstones; the flinging open of doors, the inward sweep of men-at-arms; a sudden flood of sound—The Stag was choked with soldiers, mostly drunk. There were cries to be distinguished by a fine ear, cries of "*En route, messieurs!*" cries to a leader, cries of devotion to a cause! The tall masked man was the centre of the commotion, the one fixed point in the flood of cross-purpose. He stood calm and unwinking, while about him surged a host. He, it was to be seen, was the leader, to him their devotion; his was the cause, theirs the glory to fulfil. Suddenly his sword flashed above their heads, and he spoke. "*En Avant!*" he roared, in such tones that the pewter pots upon the comptoir rattled upon their bases, and one large flagon split from rim to rim; "*En Avant*, by Cock!" and they all bundled out into the street. The tavern emptied; none remained within doors but three—the great, poising unknown, the crushed and bearded ex-hero, and the sloe-eyed wench. With fearful precipitance the hawk pounced. His eyes flaming like swords in the sun, he crossed the floor. He towered

over the travellers, with a great gesture he flung the fold of his cloak over his shoulder, and in that act swept from the table sheep's-trotters, beer and black bread. He pointed to the centre of the damsel's breast. "Follow me!" he said terribly; and she arose and followed him.

Captain Brazenhead, the colour of death, was left sole occupant of the kitchen of The Stag. There he sat, motionless, leaden and vast, for how long the Lord only knows. The trampling of horses and jingling of harness had died down; already the voice of the man who sold cat's-meat had gained the mastery of the Rue de la Ferronnière. It was high noon, but still the tavern was empty. Then Captain Brazenhead, alone in his agony, lifted up his head. Remote, unfriended, solitary, slow, he defied his affairs. His fist smote the table; his voice made his boast for him. "By Cock and his father, but I'm not in the ditch yet. If I tear not the windpipe from that throat of brass, never call me Brazenhead again." It was proudly said, though nobody heard it. He left the tavern, and stumbled blindly into the street.

CHAPTER VII

How Captain Brazenhead stole a horse need not be recounted; but a horse he stole, and never a better, and followed as hard as could be the road taken by the veiled stranger and his cavalcade. It was the southern road, as he vividly recalled, which in the company of one Pym of the drooped eyelid he had taken many years before, in those wild days when he had put a clove carnation stalk between the bright lips of Nicole La-Grâce-de-Dieu; and had, of the suddenest, turned from his journey and pelted back to Bordeaux, to wrest that fair maid from Simon Muschamp, to lay Simon fast bound upon the larder shelf, to assume the name and dignity of Count of Picpus, to make Nicole his countess, and to follow the call for help which sounded in his ears from far Provence and Madame Roesia des-Baux. Alack, those golden days of vaunt and vagrancy—no vagrant was he now, with no vaunting at his need! No, but a man over-weary of his paunch, who had been robbed of his mistress, honour and purse by some tall rascal, as like what he himself had been as one pea is like his neighbour in the pod. "That trickster stood up my very self," he

mused. "My inches, my trenchant way with all and sundry, my great nose, my fire. Ha, *Mort de Dieu!*" And he faced the sun with his question: "And who but Brazenhead is Brazenhead's peer?" They say that somewhere, in some busy coign of this earth, there lives and works the counterpart of every mother's son. If this were now his double brought up in dreadful rivalry? If he were to come to the grapple with himself—lock arms, crook with the legs, engage with teeth and desperate fingers, grunt breath for hot breath with himself? Madness lay in the very thought; he dare not picture it. Nor dare he let slip in fear, even into the vestibule of his heart that, in such a battle, not he as he stood here would prevail. "The knave hath my ancient suppleness; his joints are greased with that grease I had once. The knave hath my licking tongue that smoothed down the words till they were slab as butter. He hath my lightsome heart, my brain of fire. And what have I, old Brazenhead the steward, but this sagging paunch, these rheumy eyes, this long tooth, and this gray beard? Alack, alack, the mighty fall before the battle is cried."

These were no thoughts for a long journey, but he could find no better. He rode through the melancholy waste which men call Landes, for no better reason belike than that they are three parts water, careless of his charger's paces, careless of who saw him or whom he saw, chewing the sour cud of his thoughts, and mindful of the

under-current of spheral music which said; rhythmically, steadily and with muffled tones, "Brazenhead, Brazenhead, thou man of deeds; Brazenhead, O Brazenhead, thine hour is nigh." He climbed long stretches of scrubby heath, scarce broken by trees, descended slopes of the same to marishes, salt pools, lagoons of reed and rush. He picked, or his horse picked, an uneasy way in and out of boulders, over pebble ridges, round about desolate dunes, through the silent streets of villages where pale children stalked on stilts, and scared women crossed themselves to see the gloomy visitor. Sometimes he had tidings of the company before him, sometimes could gather none; but on he pushed, nursing the wrath to come, and forward fared the good stout horse, with his nose as often to the ground as not.

His thoughts foraged in the future without zest; they explored the past, but found no comfort there. For no sooner did they find themselves in the golden haze of happy memory, but like a blight, borne swiftly on a chill wind, came his present case to blot out all the sun and turn the warmth to eeriment. Feats of arms, feats of love—encounters in both kinds where he was always the flushed conqueror: of what avail these stirring themes when now he knew himself cast off by ladies, held cheap by his rivals? Rivals! that he should have rivals! Had it come, then, to that? But if Meg Mallow—black-eyed slut—could pass him over, was she not ill advised, mad perchance, bitten by worm

or poisonous gnat! Ah, to think of Joconde—that slip of myrtle and honeysuckle, that willowy maid of Besançon, that sidelong looker, finger-biter, that glancer of the threshold—to think of Joconde! There at least was happy memory, envisaging Besançon's narrow streets, river life, and the hustle and brawl of the minster close when the prentices were out and my Lord of Turenne's men disputed the ground with them. And Bordeaux, Bordeaux, and droop-eyed Pym, and the fair Nicole La-Grâce-de-Dieu—ply, Memory, ply, thou hast a stout web before thee! What maid of what inn could withstand so mad a wooer? Not, for sure, Nicole La-Grâce-de-Dieu. He won her with a gilly-flower, but ravished her with a countess's circlet. "Be Madame de Picpus, and my bride!" he had said; and where lay Simon Muschamp, that singing-mouse, the while? Strapped like a ham on the larder shelf. O lovely, kind, glowing Nicole, not for thee to refuse this blusterous wooer! But now—ah, soft! 'Twas Liperata's turn—that meek and lovely, sooth-fast one. For what a fate was she reserved, widow of an assassin, but Duchess of Milan! He, Brazenhead, had called her his partridge, and made her his duchess. Duchess of Milan, Liperata Duchess of Milan, *alma conjux* of the mighty Duke Salomon Testadirame, Duke of Milan! What dizzy heights, what windy places for a little woman called a man's partridge! Ply, Memory, ply this golden thread in thy spreading woof, that the falling hero, enwrapped

in its amplitude, may watch thy bright meander and take its comfort to his own!

With such provender did Captain Brazenhead, sore beset upon his latest pilgrimage, feed his hungry heart; and when, after a meal of the sort, he glanced down at his sliding chest, and marked how very much it was engulfed in his lower reaches, there was nothing for it but to begin again, and make another attack upon his stored memory, in which the Sultan of Persia, two Popes of Rome and Avignon, the long-armed Bilboan, and other heroes of antiquity and his own day played parts not inferior to his own. And so he memorized and glowed, and so he looked at his paunch and felt a-cold. And all this took up a full three weeks, which was all the time allowed by my Lady Say to find the Lord of Clun, cut him in half, recover the forefinger ring and return with it to Knole. But his own troubles had so far swallowed up his patron's that if you had reminded him of her, he would have turned upon you with the reply, "There is no such lady as my Lady Say, and the Lord of Clun hath no middle the which to sever at a blow!"

CHAPTER VIII

At the end of the third week he had crossed the frontier of Navarre, and was close up to the mountain ramparts of its southern boundary.

He had had tidings before ever he saw the snow-clad peaks. My Lord of Picpus, he had been told, with a gay company of minstrels, lovers, ladies and running dogs had gone into the mountains for his pleasure. They were to hold a Court of Love, in which the count himself was to take the field against all comers; a Court of Beauty in which a Golden Plum was to be bestowed upon his lordship by the chosen fair. Why, in God's name, upon his lordship? he had cried out, and had been answered, because his lordship was about to be victor in the lists. To which the only answer Captain Brazenhead had to hand was, "Oh, was he so?" And when to the assurance that so he was, Captain Brazenhead with an oath had replied, "Let this false Picpus look for me," the answer of the blinking cleric, his informant, had been, "His lordship will deal with you, Sir, as King Solomon with the Queen of Sheba, in whom, we read, after treatment, there was no more spirit at all. It is clear, dear Sir," the good

man had added, "that you know not the prowess, and have not had report of the deeds of him we call Count of Picpus. He is the mightiest lover and swiftest smiter, I dare say, of any now calling Christ his Redeemer. 'Tis said that, as man to man, he once took the Pope by the beard. 'Tis said that, armed with the thigh-bone of a philosopher, he slew three hundred Anabaptists——" Captain Brazenhead threw up his head and howled like a dog. "Miserable priest, 'twas myself who achieved all this—and more!" he roared at him. But the priest shook his head. "Not likely," he said, "not likely. These are the deeds of a younger man. That beard, that swelling paunch ——" but Captain Brazenhead, too proud to argue, too dreary to refute, left the clergyman, and pushed on.

Omens gathered about him, thick as flies, and dark. He saw an old crow on a rock-littered hill-side, preening a ragged wing, and anon pausing to croak his misfortune to the empty air. He saw a three-legged fox—a very bad sign. He saw a sheep on its back, and ravens wheeling above him. He saw a blind beggar lead another into a water-course. He saw three wenches and a clown, which is too many, and two gypsy women and a child, which is too few. When he hailed them to tell him his good fortune, they stared, looked at one another and laughed. Then said one, "Avaunt, thou old goat!" and both shrilled together. Heavy tidings all these, to a man on edge with sensibility.

He entered a gloomy defile where a bridle-path was cut out of the rock, and the crags closed in above you almost to shut out the light of the sky. He addressed himself to God and pushed forward. There seemed no way out—so far as eye could pierce the murk there was nothing to be seen but rock answering to rock, and peak edging upon peak. If the joyous company had passed this way, it must have been in file, and it were strange that some hint of their going had not been left upon bush or sharp-toothed stone. But search the most anxious revealed little or nothing. A scrap or two of paper with music scored upon it; a word or two upon it, "O love, alas!" or "Ah, breast of snow!" To Captain Brazenhead, who had never been a reader, these waifs of story told nothing. A filament of silk, stained red and green, told him more. He preserved it carefully; and then a faded rosebud—and then a glove. I don't know what he had expected—whether that the company should have shed garment after garment, kicked off their shoes, or hung portraits of themselves upon the box and juniper bushes with which the mountains were thick; but he was disappointed with his relics. "All goes amiss with me, good lack. The time was when, stern-chasing like this, she would have left me clear word that I was to follow. A lock of her lustrous hair, maybe, a tooth-pick that was familiar, a nail-paring or a scarf. But no! Old Brazenhead, the mighty lover, hath loved his last. Shame, shame on

pretty women; and to the plague with them all, say I." But, even in so saying, he knew that he lied. It was he who went to the plague-pit, and they that shunned it. The conqueror was conquered, the fryer of hearts now toasted himself upon the grid, and Meg Mallow basted him with lard.

At the end of three days and nights the defile opened suddenly upon an ample green valley bathed in the full sun and canopied only by the peerless blue of heaven. A fair river watered it; on either side of that were fresh meads, trees in yellow autumn leaf; beyond them upland pastures climbed towards the girdle of mountains.

There, finally, amid-scene he beheld silk pavilions, flags and gay company. Ladies were seated in a half-ring upon the grass; minstrels in parti-colour stood with lutes in their hands. Tall and commanding, in golden raiment with a blood-coloured cloak, in beaver and pheasant's feather, with sword and mask, surveyed the ladies, surveyed the dappled meadow, the terrible stranger of Bordeaux, who called himself Count of Picpus. Captain Brazenhead's brain reeled. All this then was true. It was no dream. There was such a man, and there below him, awaiting, he was. The time was at hand when two champions must prove each other.

Meantime the Lord of Clun, with unsawed middle, and Lady Say's forefinger ring about his neck by a chain, was in the good city of Paris with his friend the Duke of Clarence.

CHAPTER IX

ADDRESSED finally to the adventure, his horse abandoned, Captain Brazenhead like some huge bird of prey hopped down the rocks, with arms extended, and cloak spread broad like flaggy wings. At every perch he cawed defiance. "Have at thee, thief!" "Dog! I dare thee!" "False Picpus, face the true!" and other like challenges. For some time the air received his cries and wafted them from peak to peak of the mountains. Echo here tossed them to echo yonder. The name of Picpus, the name of dog reverberated, the one like hissing water where it boils in some close inlet of the sea, the other, with its assonants of hog, log, bog, and the like, flew round the valley like the shots of a cannon. But the company below, being well out of range, heard neither, and continued their amorous play.

Nevertheless Captain Brazenhead descended by leaps and bounds, and, descending, hurled injury after injury upon his unconscious rival. So by-and-by one of the seated ladies looked brightly up, saw him, and pointed him out. The minstrels stopped the thrumming of their lutes;

the grooms by the horses were all attention, and the magnificent person, the centre of their sports, himself veered about and, leaning upon his long sword, watched the calamitous approach of his enemy. That, as it neared its term—which can only be said to have been the breast of the awaiting swordsman, or the point of his blade—was heralded by the flight of innumerable small birds, finches, linnets and what not—scared from their nests and fastnesses as by the imminence of some vast monster of the air. These flickering songsters, as they flew in a cloud over the heads of the gay company in the meadow, caused the scarves of the ladies to stream in the wind, and made the milk-white palfreys snort as they inhaled the dust. Thus, as a fresh gale presages the storm of thunder and rain which is to wreak destruction on the land, these feathered heralds prepared the little band for wreck and ruin.

When Captain Brazenhead had reached the valley bottom, and had no more than a hundred yards of level going between him and the death he sought—to impart or receive, he cared not which—he paused to take the great breath of which he had need. Not only was his person discomposed, but it was quite impossible for him to compass any more terms of reproach, partly because he could not remember any more in any of the five languages of which he was master, and partly because he had neither voice nor breath at his command. "Winded, by Cock!" was all that he could now say, and the reproach of that

was aimed at himself. On their side, the three ladies with their single cavalier awaited him with interest, but in silence; and the minstrels, their lutes slung over their shoulders, folded their hands before them and stood at what is called ease. The sun shone in the clear pale sky, the trees in their golden dress of departure swayed and ruffled in the breeze; the river foamed and bickered as it surged among the rocks; all that favoured span of earth was at peace, and nothing in visible creation groaned and travailed but man, and that man Captain Brazenhead, the hero weary and far spent, who fetched up his breath as the housewife water from a well by means of a crazy windlass, with creakings and groanings terrible to hear.

But fetch it up he did, in ample store for his purpose; and then with drawn sword, and cloak thrown over one shoulder, stalked greatly to the proof. Nothing in his life became him like this dreadful testing of it. I think that he knew what awaited him there upon the enamelled sward; for when he found it, his senses reeled no more. His calmness at the shocking discovery was proof against shock. Not a word can henceforth be uttered by moralist, theologian, or doctor of law against this hero's essential magnanimity. With calm eyes beneath his brows, with those brows unruffled, with cheeks unpaled he stood confronting himself—himself, himself, and no other—and the ladies on the grass. Of these one was, of course, Mistress Mallow of the household of

Knole; Mistress Mallow, the buxom and sloe-eyed, dressed now in murrey-coloured velvet of Genoa, and about her peaked head-dress a scarf of gold and white gauze. But Mistress Mallow was perturbed if her reprover was not. Words were on the tip of her pointed tongue; but she said nothing. The other pair of ladies may be briefly described. One was corn-haired, flushed and grey-eyed. She had a sharp chin and a fine figure. She confronted Captain Brazenhead with arms akimbo, bending forward from her hips, as a maid of the house looks up at you from her knees, or a maid of the laundry from her board by the river. Her lips were very red, and upon them, crimson upon scarlet, was a clove-carnation, whose stalk her teeth held fast. Her gown was a goodly green, and her scarf was blue. The third lady was demure as a wimpled nun, and kept her eyes upon her lap. If for a moment she might lift them, you would have discovered them unfathomable brown. She was grave and attentive. It was clear she saw but one thing at a time, and that thing, always, her duty. She was dressed in a rich brocade, of which the ground work was orange tawny, and the figures worked in black and gold. As for the squire of these noble persons, he was now unveiled, and showed as a splendid figure of a man of, it might be, some thirty-seven summers. Straight six feet four, beaked like a very fine eagle, hairy to a fault, with mustachios which swept upwards to a point midway between his eyes and the tips of his ears,

with hair gushing from his nostrils like water-spray from the cracks in a hatch, with hair upon his fingers, the backs of his hands, and as far as one could see welling from some inexhaustible spring within the recesses of his clothing, with eyes deep and glowing, with the swiftness of tigers in every line of his limbs—this was the terrible guardian of the honour of three ladies, with every one of whom Captain Brazenhead, spent as he was, was about to claim intimate acquaintance, dating, in some cases, from many years back.

But first he came to terms, as was fitting, with his man. Plucking at his beard with one hand, shaking his sword in the other—"Thou purfled thing," said Captain Brazenhead in deep tones of a bell; "thou inflamed weed, who from some midden-heap hast arisen—— "

But the younger hero cut the words out of his mouth, and in a clear, smooth voice which wound about the circumpendent slopes like a scarlet ribbon, picked up the parable and turned it to his own exalted purpose.

"Purfled am I, thou old deceiver, being full store of high blood, descendant of kings, and king (or at least duke) by right of sword. And inflamed am I likewise by great endeavour, even as thou mumblest in thy toothless chaps, O thou grey-beard, wagging for penury. But weed, by Cock, am I none, and I cast it back into thy throat as all the alms thou wilt get from me, thou robber of infants and wheedler of the simple."

Calm and unflinching, Captain Brazenhead reproved the man by a question: "Dost thou not know me then, thou pale egg of evil? Dost thou strike at random, little snake? Know me then to thy shame. Late of Burgundy, formerly of Milan——" But the other flamed high.

"*Late*, thou! *Formerly*, thou! Ay, late indeed—ay, thou stultifier of youth. For know thou me, as *now* of Burgundy, as *now* of Milan—and pocket thy stale reports." And then, to Captain Brazenhead's entire dismay, he began this account of himself: "When with this sword and sinewy arm, being otherwise mother-naked, I slew the Sultan of Babylon in his pride, and all the towers of his chief city rocked to see it, so great was the concourse of the people—where wert thou, but queasing over thy sea-coal fire, stirring groats in a pipkin? And when, as one man with another, sitting in familiar discourse with the Holy Father, I flicked him lightly on the cheek and bade him prove himself—where wert thou, but filling that belly of thine with broken victuals under the buttery hatch? And when I plucked Milan from his throne, and sat myself thereupon, and did judgment to all and sundry, having put to rout 5000 Anabaptists with a shankbone—how was it then with thee? And of my fighting in the pit with countless cut-throats—and of my Cardinalate, and of my County of Picpus—what sayest thou, old foot-in-the-grave? Am I, thinkest thou, such an one as would stoop to lie to thee, having died the death these half-hundred times? Foh, but

thou art a boaster, I believe. Twenty times left for dead; trampled twelve times out——"

But Captain Brazenhead here gave a great cry —so great that it amazed the speaker and for a moment stayed him. The elder man bent down his crest, and fought with his hands, as if to clear the thick air. And when he lifted up his face again, there was that in it that compelled respect unto what he might do.

Slowly now he spoke, and all listened. "Either thou art myself, or thou art nought. Now let me put this question to the test. If thou art myself, be sure that I slay thee; if thou art nought, be sure also. But if thou art myself, in the act to slay thee, I perish, and if thou art nought I slay myself. Hold thou there till I require thee; hold thou there."

He summoned all his forces; lifted to his full height, flicked up his moustache, and smoothed down his beard. His sword he flung to earth; but he brushed down the ample folds of his cloak with his hand before he flung the other end of it over his shoulder. This done, hat in hand, he stalked ceremoniously forward and stood proudly before the flushed lady whose mouth still held the carnation.

"O Nicole," he said; "O my Countess of Picpus! Has it come to this that thou passest me by?"

But she eyed him fiercely. "How sayest thou, old rip?" cried she. "How should I be thy Countess of Picpus, when I am this

gentleman's? And how should thou be Count of Picpus, when he is here, the Count's self of Picpus, so proper a man? Get thee away, old fellow, and nurse thy paunch."

Captain Brazenhead, of a leaden grey colour in the face, turned from that lady, and faced another, that staider person who sat upon Madame de Picpus' right hand. She did not lift her eyes to him, but kept them carefully upon her lap.

"Dost thou remember, Liperata, the cemetery of Sant' Eustorgio, and what befel thy Camus there?"

She bowed her head.

"Thou wert," he continued in grave tones, "a man's partridge, O Liperata!"

"A true man's partridge still am I," she said.

"And who made thee Duchess of Milan, pardie?" cried Captain Brazenhead very wildly.

She pointed to the stranger. "Behold the gentleman."

Captain Brazenhead threw up his arms. Words failed him quite. Then, finally, he turned upon Mistress Mallow where, bold-eyed, she sat.

"As for thee, kitchen-wench," said he, "I leave thee to thy fate. Thou didst desert me for this weed. Get thy good from his carrion, for carrion shall he be."

With a howl like that of a wounded wolf, he turned the white of his eye to the women, and before one could be aware of the cheep of a bird he was upon the tall man. He, in his turn, was all-too ready.

They engaged in silent and deadly grapple. Locked, they swayed together, Captain Brazenhead's teeth in the strange man's shoulder, the strange man's in Captain Brazenhead's. Round and about they whirled, entirely silent and entirely gripped. And faster they went, and faster still, and at last so fast that the place seemed the vortex of great winds, with a swirling mass of red and yellow helpless in the current. How long this may have endured I don't pretend to say; but at last they sprang apart and stood for a more deadly bout, gaping, panting, glaring at each other.

A second time Captain Brazenhead howled, then pounced upon his sword, and, lifting it, rushed upon the foe. He, no less prepared, engaged at once, and at it they went like mad bulls, or belling stags in some glade of the forest. Their fury was such that the rules of Art were put aside; without foining or guarding they merely hacked at each other until each was disguised in blood, and neither could see his foe at all. Then, for a second time, they paused; and presently Captain Brazenhead spoke:

"Thou art myself, I see," he said, "for I have fought the length of this old world, but never with one like thee. Now mark me well, that if I die, thou must needs die also; and be sure that if thou diest, so die I. For never again shall old Brazenhead encounter such a foeman as thou art; and all fighting shall be stale, by Cock, that cometh after this. Have at thee, drinker, let us die thirsty while we can."

Nothing spoke his foeman, but leaned upon his sword watchful of the enemy; and then for a third and last time Captain Brazenhead threw up his chin and howled long and tragically into the sky. Raising then his sword arm, which shook like aspens in the wind, and shielding his person with what remained of his cloak he stumbled forward heavily upon the blade of the other man, and thrust his own blade with all his might clean through his breastbone. The stricken heroes, mortally wounded, stood, each propped by the other, staring upon the work they had done—then swaying sideways, now this way, now that, sideways fell, and lay in death.

The terrified ladies rose to their feet, and, shrieking, fled from the spot.

Thus fell in the year of grace 1477 Salomon Brazenhead the Great, seventh son of a seventh son, born miraculously in the seventh month.

Never beaten in the field, but now in this last struggle; never refused of woman but in favour of himself as he had now been, none but his own youth, it appears, could have slain him, nor any slain his own youth but himself—a conclusion metaphysical, philosophic, religious and exact, and as true as that I, the historian, sit here to write.

THE END

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EXTRACT FROM PAGE 180.

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796. **Drusilla's Point of View.** Madame Albanesi
797. **The Sacred Skull.** George Griffith.
798. **Redemption.** René Bazin
799. **Julian Steele.** Constantine Ralli
800. **The Magic of May.** "Iota"
801. **Written in Red.** Author of "A Time of Terror," etc.
802. **The Forefront of the Battle.** Andrew Loring
803. **The Man-Made Law.** Coralie Stanton and Heath Hosken
804. **During Her Majesty's Pleasure.** M. E. Braddon
805. **The Forewarners.** Giovanni Cena With an Introduction by Mrs. Humphry Ward
806. **The Edge O'Beyond.** Gertrude Page
807. **The Orchard Close.** A. and C. Askew
808. **The Mystery of a Motor-Cab.** Fergus Hume
809. **Angel Esquire.** Edgar Wallace
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815. **The Devil's Ace.** Fergus Hume
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817. **A White Witch.** Theo. Douglas
*818. **Young Nemesis.** Frank T. Bullen, F.R.G.S.
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822. **By Faith Alone.** René Bazin
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*825. **The War in the Air.** *Illus.* H. G. Wells
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827. **The House of the Crickets.** Katherine Tynan
*828. **Round the Fire Stories.** A. C. Doyle
*829. **An Immortal Soul.** W. H. Mallock
830. **The Spin of the Coin.** E. R. Punshon
831. **The Gorgeous Borgia.** J. H. McCarthy
832. **The End of the Journey.** Edward H. Cooper
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834. **The Imbeciles.** L. Lockhart Lang
835. **Paddy-the-Next-Best-Thing.** Gertrude Page
836. **The Broad Road.** Annie S. Swan
837. **The Luck of Norman Dale.** Barry Pain and James Blyth
838. **Mr. Beke of the Blacks.** John Ayscough
839. **This, My Son.** René Bazin
840. **Cannibal Crusader.** J. E. Panton
841. **Lady Jennifer.** John Strange Winter
842. **Bruised Lilies.** Lucas Cleeve
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844. **The New Andromeda.** Carlton Dawe
845. **The Degenerate.** Fred Whishaw

846. **Stranleigh's Millions.** Robert Barr
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Starbrace. Sheila Kaye-Smith
Philip Loveluck. Charles Owen
The Liberty of Love. James Blyth
Winifred. Roy Horniman
Village Temptress. Fred Whishaw
Marchester Royal. J. S Fletcher
The Coming of Aurora. Mrs. P. Champion de Crespigny
The Unlit Lamp. Algernon Gissing
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874. **Midsummer Madness.** Morley Roberts
875. **A Wild Beauty.** Dick Donovan
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879. **Dorrien Carfax.** Nowell Griffyth
880. **Mr. Justice Raffles.** E. W. Hornung
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933. **The Osbornes.** E. F. Benson
934. **The Race Before Us.** Guy Thorne
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936. **Hardican's Hollow** J. S. Fletcher
937. **Mona's Weird.** Capt. Henry Curties
938. **Lady Ann.** L. T. Meade

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Carniola. Theodore Watts-Dun
* **The Fight for Lord Arpen** Anthony Hope
High Water Mark. Fergus H
Blair's Ken. "Coo-Ee"
Mrs. Fitz. J. C. Snaith
A Rolling Stone. B. M. Croke
The Silver King A. Wilson B.
The Major's Niece. George A. Birmingham
Spell Land. Sheila Kaye-Smith
The Unknown To-morrow. W. Le Queux
The First of the Ebb. Ronald MacDonald

[illegible] Roy Norton
[illegible]
[illegible] John Selborne
[illegible] Right. W.,
[illegible] De S. Wentworth James
[illegible] M. E. Carr
The Rose in the [illegible] George Barr McCutcheon
* **The Kingdom of Slender Swords.** Hallie Ermine Rives
Empire of the World. C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne
New Novel. W. E. Norris